

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR JEWISH CHILDREN

BY

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A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR JEWISH CHILDREN

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Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children, including Jewish Yoga, Jewish Meditation, Jewish stories, children's books which incorporate moral lessons, spiritual listening, reflective presence, prayer, and musical expression was incorporated into ten b'nai mitzvah classes at the supplementary religious school at the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore in Bay Shore, New York. Holy Listening, in verbal and nonverbal prayerful expression, biblical readings, torah, psalms, Jewish Journaling, and personal interaction, were studied through qualitative data collected from the youth. The b'nai mitzvah (which is the Hebrew plural form of bar mitzvah) curriculum was expanded in order to support the students' own spiritual journey, as they prepared to gain the status in Jewish law as Jewish men. Foundational study of Spiritual Direction and alternative Jewish spiritual models helped connect youth to God, to their fellow b'nai mitzvah peers and to the congregation.

## DEDICATION

For Jewish children who seek a conversation with God.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The goal of providing spiritual direction for Jewish children is twofold: since Jewish Spiritual Direction is a relatively new endeavor in non-Orthodox Jewish circles, the goal was to implement a version of Jewish Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children that would be appropriate for them, and specifically for pre-teen youth (b'nai mitzvah).

In implementing Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children the questions that arose were about how to implement spiritual direction for children. Although there weren't any books specifically for implementing spiritual direction to children, initial research of the term spiritual direction showed predominantly Christian resources. Upon closer research of terminology using the word spiritual I was surprised to find that educational resources for teaching children in public schools were integrating the core tools used in Jewish Spiritual Direction as I was seeing them integrated through Jewish Renewal. This included yoga, meditation, music and journaling.

Before discussing the innovation within the emerging field of Jewish Spiritual Direction, it is important to understand the concept of Spiritual Direction. How do we define Spiritual Direction? What is its history? How has it developed? How does Jewish Spiritual Direction fit it? Ultimately, the focus narrows to Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. I have capitalized certain first letters of the words Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children and Spiritual Direction for Children for the purpose of drawing attention to a new formal category of thought. The sources used are not consistent regarding capitalization of the letters of the words Spiritual Direction. In some places it is found in

all lower case letters as spiritual direction. In other places, it is found capitalized as Spiritual Direction. The sources used in research reflect this inconsistency, and therefore quotations from these sources will reveal the inconsistency in capitalization or lack of capitalization of the term Spiritual Direction or conversely spiritual direction.

In order to make the case that Jewish Spiritual Direction for Children is an innovation, the research will conclude that there is a lack of data in the field of Jewish Spiritual Direction for Children. That is why this demonstration project becomes a groundbreaking study.

In my abstract I include Jewish Yoga, Jewish Meditation, children's books that incorporate moral lessons, spiritual listening and reflective presence, prayer, and musical expression as methods of implementing Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. Holy Listening is another term used in place of Spiritual Direction. I include this term in the abstract in order to emphasize the interplay between speaking and listening. The speaker may be a spiritual guide or the speaker may be God. Just as our holy patriarchs, matriarchs and prophets had conversations with God we too can take the time to speak and to listen.

Since immediate evaluation was incorporated into the teaching method, a distinction is made between verbal and nonverbal expression. Prayer, biblical readings, the five books of the bible known as torah by Jews, psalms, Jewish journaling and personal interaction were used as tools for implementation of Spiritual Direction for

Jewish Children. The tools or methods listed help provide data in evaluation of Spiritual Direction for Jewish children.

Prayer was read to students and also students created their own prayers. Biblical readings, torah, and psalms provided a reference point for discussion. In the case of the psalms, the students actually moved their bodies from head to toe as a way of praying. Jewish journaling and personal interaction were ways of encouraging students to reflect and communicate.

The following project also provides information on how the bar or bat mitzvah is viewed by the Jewish community at large. This age group was picked due to the circumstance of these students graduating immediately after the project was implemented. Time was of the essence in catching them before they graduated from the religious school. Serendipitously many insights were gleaned regarding an enhanced model of educating bar and bat mitzvah students. They learned from us and we learned from them. This does not take the focus away from students of all ages. The premise of this dissertation is that Spiritual Direction can be implemented for Jewish children.

Although the context for implementing Spiritual Direction for Children was the supplementary school of a synagogue, the focus on Spiritual Direction for Children could be implemented outside of the synagogue setting. Spiritual directors can function in a setting outside of a religious structure. Theoretically then, so could spiritual directors for children.

In *Parenting Jewish Teens: a Guide for the Perplexed* by Doades, she includes findings of a report prepared by the Commission of Children at Risk revealing that, “We are witnessing high and rising rates of depression, anxiety, attention deficit, conduct disorders, thoughts of suicide and other serious mental, emotional and behavioral problems among U.S. children and adolescents.”<sup>1</sup> According to the report, “In large measure, what’s causing the crisis of American childhood is a lack of connectedness. ...close connection to other people, and deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning.”<sup>2</sup>

For purposes of this paper, the implementation of my project focused upon Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children functioning within the religious structure of a supplementary Jewish school held at the synagogue. This school was and is available to the families who are members of the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore, where I serve as both the rabbi and the principal. All the behaviors, listed by Doades above, were part of the challenges present in the lives of the students who participated in the implementation of spiritual direction for children in the religious school and are documented in the findings of me and my site team, who participated in the evaluation of the findings.

What, virtually, all Jewish children enrolled in a supplementary Jewish religious education share is the high point of a bar or bat mitzvah. The irony is that many pulpit

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<sup>1</sup> Joanne Doades, *Parenting Jewish Teens: a Guide for the Perplexed* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

rabbis preach to the bar or bat mitzvah that their ceremony is the beginning of their Jewish responsibilities as a Jewish adult in the Jewish community. What is supposed to be a spiritual highpoint in their lives, increasing their participation in the synagogue, in general terms is, most generally, signifying the end of their connection to the synagogue and in many cases alienating them from any Jewish religious connection.

Rabbi Lewis D. Solomon writes about revitalizing the Jewish supplemental school education in his book *Jewish Spirituality: Revitalizing Judaism for the Twenty-First Century*. “In the twenty-first century, it is almost axiomatic that improvements must take place in Jewish education for children...Jewish supplemental school education faces a number of distressing difficulties: sporadic attendance...and a high dropout rate (more than fifty percent) after bar/bat mitzvah...They do not guide children toward increased Jewish involvement...We should attune Jewish education of children...toward the highest levels of Jewish Spirituality: a deep God-realization, our conduct toward others, and personal virtues. In addition to providing a spiritual and moral foundation, Jewish supplemental schooling should include an introduction to...the Psalms...Through this type of education, children...will come to love not only God but also all of humanity.”<sup>3</sup> Solomon adds that a Jewish spirituality turning to a more personal religion focuses upon inner experiences.

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis D. Solomon, *Jewish Spirituality: Revitalizing Judaism for the Twenty-First Century* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 2000), 310-11.

Therefore, we should initiate children into the importance of private prayer, meditation and visualization. “Being able to appeal for God’s assistance and guidance in times of difficulty...will prevent children...from being thrown into panic and despair.”<sup>4</sup>

At the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore, the most popular life cycle ritual held in the synagogue is the bar or bat mitzvah. Within the congregation, rabbinic and Jewish professional circles, making synagogue involvement relevant beyond the bar or bat mitzvah has been discussed regularly. Since ‘having a party’ has been a huge motivator for families joining synagogues, the challenge has been to influence bar and bat mitzvah students and their families that the synagogue has a legitimate spiritual purpose for the bar and bat mitzvah family after ‘the party’. The following joke makes light of the reality of not seeing children after their bar or bat mitzvah.

A terrible plague of mice was threatening to overwhelm the small town. For some reason the infestation seemed particularly acute in the houses of worship. So the three local clergy got together to talk about their shared problem. The Priest whose parish church stood proudly on Main Street told his tale of woe: thousands of dollars invested in experts and exterminators, a week of tenting the whole building and fumigating it with lethal gases-all to no avail; the church was still overrun with mice. The minister from a neighboring church recounted a similar tale of woe; she had all the Sunday school children come and bang pots and pans, creating a huge racket to try and scare the mice away. Then they laid traps and spread poison-all to no avail. Then the rabbi proudly reported that his synagogue was free of mice. When asked how he was able to accomplish this task, he replied it was easy. He gathered all the mice, gave each one a

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

pecially crafted tiny kippah and tallit, had them all become Bar Mitzvah, and he never saw them again!<sup>5</sup>

Let's speak the unspeakable and be done with it. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is the bane of Jewish education. It is the tail that wags the dog, the lens through which a youngster's entire Jewish schooling is viewed. Curricula are reshaped to produce stellar performances on the pulpit. The child does admirably on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah day and the school is vindicated...[I]t is the promise of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah that brings many parents to...the Religious School...<sup>6</sup>

says Carol Ingall in the chapter entitled "Bar/Bat Mitzvah: Policies and Programs" found in the book *Bar/ Bat Mitzvah Education* by Helen Leneman.

The term 'bar mitzvah' is a joining of two languages. Bar is Aramaic for the word son. Mitzvah is a Hebrew word deriving from the word for commandment. The rabbis of Talmudic times determined that the bar mitzvah age for a boy is thirteen years old and for a girl twelve years old. At that age they were seen as young adults bound by the laws of Judaism. Mitzvot, the plural form of mitzvah, indicates the obligations incumbent upon Jewish adults.

In *The Essential Guide to Jewish Prayer and Practices* by Judaic Studies Professor Andrea Lieber, the author writes that mitzvot are a spiritual discipline, but poses the question, "What if you don't feel particularly 'commanded' to perform

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<sup>5</sup> My Kippah.com "Kippah Jokes," [http://www.mykippah.com/page\\_jokes.html](http://www.mykippah.com/page_jokes.html) (accessed 9 September 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Helen Leneman, *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Education: a Sourcebook* (Denver, Colo.:A.R.E.Publishing Inc., 1994), 39.

mitzvot?”<sup>7</sup> Lieber includes the response that “Jewish legend says that the soul every Jew, including those who convert to Judaism, was present at Mount Sinai to witness the revelation of the Torah...The Torah actually calls the mitzvot our communal morasha – our communal inheritance.”<sup>8</sup>

In the book *Jewish with Feeling*, Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi writes,

[T]he Jewish vision of spirituality in action is based on mitzvot, a word usually translated as commandments. But in a world without kings, in a democratic society, the word commandment has lost its power. The old understanding of being commanded was of commandments handed down on a mountain, of an authority beaming down upon us from above. Today any sense of commandment must come from within, from inside us.<sup>9</sup>

Schacter-Shalomi says that performing the conscious act of a mitzvah draws us into a higher level of dialogue with the universe. “We act out of a desire to communicate with that holy presence we have felt.”<sup>10</sup>

In “*Voices in the Dark: How Do We Hear God*” by Elyse D. Frishman, in the book *Duties of the Soul*, she says that tradition holds that God gave us mitzvot, commanding certain behaviors. Yet, Frishman asks the question: How do we hear God’s voice? The plural ‘we’ refers to both men and women and yet there is a difference as to how men and women listen and speak.

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<sup>7</sup> Andrea Lieber, *The Essential Guide to Jewish Prayer and Practices* (New York: Alpha Books, 2012), 22.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Zalman Schacter-Shalomi and Joel Segel, *Jewish with Feeling* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005) 116-117.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



Frishman quotes Tannen saying, “Deborah Tannen, author of *You Just Don’t Understand* and *Gender Discourse*, has observed that men and women communicate differently...Tannen’s work reveals that men listen for the sound of authority...Men appreciate status, women appreciate intimacy.”<sup>11</sup>

In the late twentieth century and now in the twenty-first century, American Jews are searching for spiritual intimacy.

Torah has been interpreted traditionally by and for men. As more and more women are engaged in Torah study and commentary, a different interpretation can emerge, one that hears God not as Commander but as Partner...Dialogue between two people grows not from what is said but from what is heard. Consider the conversation between a teenager and parent. The child may hear the parent speaking in a certain tone...while the parent is unaware of that tone.”<sup>12</sup>

Over the years, teenagers have been accommodating parents, teachers, Hebrew School principals, cantors and rabbis, all of whom share expectations of a standard course of Jewish learning. These b’nai mitzvah students have mastered a certain level of Hebrew and liturgical proficiency to enable them to participate in the milestone of the bar or bat mitzvah. The official bar or bat mitzvah culminates with the chanting of a haftarah portion in Hebrew with a special melody known as trope. This haftarah is a prophetic reading taken from either the book of Prophets or the book of Writings found in the Jewish bible, known as a Tanakh. The Tanakh is comprised of the Torah, which are the

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<sup>11</sup> Niles E. Goldstein and Peter S. Knobel, eds., *Duties of the Soul: the Role of Commandments in Liberal Judaism* (New York: UAHF Press, 1999), 116-117.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

five books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings. Family, friends and the congregation officially celebrate this momentous occasion in synagogue.

As a rabbi and principal, who also retired as a children's librarian, I will show that my focus group of students preparing for a Jewish coming of age ceremony is relevant to children at large. The students preparing for a bar mitzvah represent the culmination of a religious Jewish education. Although there is a dimension of implied adulthood inherent in the term bar mitzvah, my research will show that the students' teen or tween status does not put them into a category outside of the status of 'children'.

According to Rabbi Jeffery K. Salkin in "Bar and Bat Mitzvah's Meaning; Preparing Spiritually with Your Child" is the following insight, "Today, bar/bat mitzvah is the most popular synagogue ceremony in American Judaism...We have to keep our eyes on the prize, and here, the prize is spiritual."<sup>13</sup>

In "Changing Up the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Experience" By Gary Rosenblatt, Rabbi Joy Levit

believes that the heavy emphasis on teaching youngsters to chant a Haftarah on their special days is a sign of 'wasted training and the wrong message' for bar and bat mitzvah youngsters... 'We're not preparing them for Jewish life with such rituals, she says, on the contrary, we've sabotaged their Jewish life.'...Strong words, but Rabbi Levitt has given the subject a lot of thought, based on her observations of many years as a pulpit rabbi and officiating at hundreds of coming-of-age ceremonies... Sally Gottesman, chair of...a national organization that encourages teens to engage more deeply in Judaism, says our community should be making

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey K. Salkin, *Bar and Bat Mitzvah's Meaning: Preparing Spiritually with Your Child*, ed. Nancy Flam, Life Lights 43 (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006), 5.

bar and bat mitzvah ‘a rite of passage into something rather than from something’.<sup>14</sup>

Rosenblatt further quotes Gottesman and Levitt saying,

It’s been a cliché and embarrassment that so many bar and bat mitzvahs in America are marked by excessive spending...Part of why the post-bar and bat mitzvah festivities tend to eclipse the religious ceremony itself may be because the synagogue service often has little meaning for the youngster in the spotlight... Rabbi Levitt says, “The irony is that the words of the prophets, which were supposed to stir the people, now puts them to sleep.”<sup>15</sup>

In another article by Gary Rosenblatt entitled “URJ Overhauling the Bar/Bat Mitzvah” he quotes Temple Emanuel’s senior rabbi, Laura Geller, who has led the 800-household congregation for 17 years. She “...said that unfortunately, for ‘far too many’ liberal Jews, bar or bat mitzvah ‘is the goal of Jewish education,’ marking the end of the process rather than the onset of a path to a life of Jewish inquiry and learning... ‘The bar or bat mitzvah can’t continue to be a terminal degree...”<sup>16</sup>

In “Changing Up the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Experience,” Rosenblatt mentions that rabbis like Laura Geller “...say that a radical change is required, a rethinking of the relationship between Jewish education and the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gary Rosenblatt “Changing Up the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Experience,” *The Jewish Week*, April 17, 2003. <http://www.thejewishweek.com/print/23309> (accessed 9 October 2012).Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Gary Rosenblatt “Changing Up the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Experience,” *The Jewish Week*, April 17, 2003. <http://www.thejewishweek.com/print/23309> (accessed 9 October 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Gary Rosenblatt, “URJ Overhauling the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.” *The Jewish Week*, June 19, 2012. <http://www.thejewishweek.com/editorial-opinion/gary-rosenblatt/urj-overhauling-barbat-mitzvah> (accessed 9 October 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Gary Rosenblatt “Changing Up the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Experience.”.

Rosenblatt writes about the efforts “to reverse the trend of young people ending their Jewish education after the big day on the bima.”<sup>18</sup> The current project was undertaken in the spirit of these calls for re-envisioning the b’nai mitzvah experience.

*What is Spiritual Direction?*

Before going into details about how Spiritual Direction was used as a method to deepen the b’nai mitzvah students’ spiritual experience, I will first define Spiritual Direction, Jewish Spiritual Direction and specifically Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children.

What is Spiritual Direction? In the book *Women at the Well* Kathleen Fischer writes,

I am aware of the problematic nature of the term ‘spiritual direction.’ As many authors have pointed out, neither ‘spiritual’ nor ‘direction’ aptly describes what it has become today. Spiritual Direction is not ‘spiritual’ in the sense that it focuses upon the compartment of life divorced from everyday concerns. Nor is it ‘direction’ if that is understood as one person taking responsibility for another’s life and telling that person what to do.<sup>19</sup>

A definition of Spiritual Direction is found in the book *Inviting the Mystic*,

*Supporting the Prophet: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction:*

Admittedly, the term ‘spiritual direction’ is woefully inadequate...Our concern is not simply with the spiritual but with the whole person: body, mind and spirit...All of life is or can be theophany, and our concern is with all the instruments and melodies, all the notes and movements of the song...Our relationship is not that of a guru to the uninitiated, or of a parent to a child, or of a teacher to a student, but a relationship that does

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Kathleen Fischer, *Women at the Well: Feminist Perspectives on Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 3.

whatever it can to facilitate God's own direction in our lives. We are more accurately described as beggars going out together, helping each other search for food.<sup>20</sup>

In *Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction*, Sue Pickering questions what Spiritual Direction is with an acknowledgment of the implicit tension in trying to define Spiritual Direction. "What is 'Spiritual Direction'? a self-serving novelty or a God-inspired opportunity?" Pickering adds, "However, although spiritual direction...is not well understood, to some extent because of the terms 'director' and 'directee' which are found in spiritual direction literature and history...[I]f we think of 'director' as describing someone who helps people find their own route to God, it may be easier..."<sup>21</sup>

So, although the term is liable to misunderstanding, it is probably more descriptive of the experience it points to than 'religious counseling,' 'spiritual advice,' or even 'spiritual companioning.' It is, besides, firmly entrenched in the tradition and is more widely and spontaneously used than any term that has been proposed to replace it...With some misgivings, therefore, we continue to use the term spiritual direction,<sup>22</sup>

write William A Barry and William J. Connolly in *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*.

"Spiritual direction...focuses on helping you find God amidst all the peoples, places, and events of life. Spiritual directors help you hear how God is speaking in your life, even if you fail to notice God,"<sup>23</sup> as mentioned in *Windows into the Soul*.

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<sup>20</sup> Katherine Marie Dyckman and L. Patrick Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet: an Introduction to Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 20-21

<sup>21</sup> Sue Pickering, *Spiritual Direction: a Practical Introduction* (Norwich, England: Canterbury Pr Norwich, 2008), 1.

<sup>22</sup> William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, Rev. and updated ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Sullivan, *Windows into the Soul: Art as Spiritual Expression* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2006), 6.

Spiritual Directors International says “Sacred listening transforms lives through the art of spiritual direction, spiritual guidance, spiritual accompaniment, *anam cara* in Gaelic, and *mashpiah* in Hebrew.”<sup>24</sup> In my research I have found other variations on Spiritual Direction terminology such as: spiritual guidance, spiritual companionship, spiritual friendship, spiritual counseling, and soul tending.

Spiritual Directors International partnered with Morehouse Publishing to present a book about Spiritual Guidance with a Muslim perspective. In the book *Out of Darkness into Light: Spiritual Guidance in the Quran with Reflections from Christian and Jewish Sources* Muslim Sufi Minister Jamal Rahman says that

Just as we in Western societies consult counselors and therapists, people in Islamic societies often turn to spiritual teachers for advice and guidance...every neighborhood has a number of pirs, or spiritual guides...These spiritual guides...derive their barrakka, or spiritual power, from all-night prayers, because ‘in watches in the night, impressions are strongest and words most eloquent’ (Quran 73:6)<sup>25</sup>

Minister Jamal Rahman explains that it is important to discern judgment in the choice of a spiritual guide. He emphasizes the point in the following story about the hidden genuine teacher.

Such is the case of the hidden teacher in the story about two famous sheikhs who arrived ostentatiously at a local mosque to prepare to pray. One sheikh took his shoes off and carried them with him as he stepped outside the mosque. The other teacher carefully placed his shoes outside.

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<sup>24</sup> Spiritual Directors International. “What is Spiritual Direction?” <http://www.sdiworld.org> (accessed 21 September 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Jamal Rahman, Kathleen Schmitt Elias, and Ann Holmes Redding, *Out of Darkness into Light: Spiritual Guidance in the Quran with Reflections from Jewish and Christian Sources* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 6-7.

After prayers, the sheikhs, whose every movement had been watched with intense interest, were asked to explain their actions. The first sheikh said that he took his shoes inside with him so that no one would be tempted to steal them, thus saving that person from a wrongdoing. The other said that by keeping his shoes outside he gave someone the opportunity to resist temptation to steal and thus gain merit in heaven. 'How wise and how noble,' the townsfolk agreed among themselves. To get a better understanding they went to a sage and asked which of the sheikhs was the 'true' teacher. 'Neither,' replied the sage. 'While you all were busy watching and judging, and the two sheikhs were engaged in their calculation of saving and gracing, none of you noticed a poor, shoeless man with a heart of gold who stepped into the mosque with reverence, prayed with deep fervor and devotion, and beseeched Allah to bless everyone. He is the real sheikh. His heart is turned in devotion to God and he simply brings to the moment a heart that can respond to God.'<sup>26</sup>

Minister Rahman says that the presence of such a guide in one's life is a blessing.

"This kind of teacher conforms to the descriptions of an evolved being: one who is 'humble before the Unseen and brings a heart that can respond' (Quran 50:33)."<sup>27</sup>

In the book *Reaching Godward*, Carol Ochs writes,

Underlying spiritual guidance are assumptions that form a very practical theology, one that can be applied to most situations in our lives. The main tenet in this theology is that we are created in the image of God. And as God is one and whole, people, in God's image, aspire to wholeness. When we are in emotional pain, we look for immediate relief in medications, distractions, or the hard work of psychotherapy. But the pain can and should also be regarded as an invitation to strengthen our relationship with God, because the essential unease in our lives finally boils down to the questions of who we are and how to fix into the system as a whole.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>28</sup> Carol Ochs, *Reaching Godward: Voices from Jewish Spiritual Guidance* (New York, N.Y.: URJ Press, 2004), 5.

In the book *Sacred Companions: the Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* by David G. Benner,

Often referred to by such terms as mentoring, discipleship, or spiritual guidance (these all describing slightly different but closely related forms of relationship), spiritual direction has been recently discovered by large numbers of Protestants...In its classical form, spiritual direction is a one-on-one relationship organized around prayer and conversation directed toward intimacy with God...To describe spiritual directors and friends as 'sacred companions' is to note the way they help us become more aware of the presence of the sacred.<sup>29</sup>

Regarding a definition of spiritual friend within the context of the Jewish pious movement of Hasidim founded by the Baal Shem Tov, Yitzhak Buxbaum writes in his book *Jewish Spiritual Practices* that "Many rebbes give the counsel...to 'get yourself a friend' to be a companion in religious matters."<sup>30</sup> Buxbaum defines rebbe as a hasidic leader who heads a following of Hasidim.

In *God at the Center: Meditations on Jewish Spirituality* by David R. Blumenthal, On Spiritual Counseling...at the beginning of this reading, Moses' father-in-law comes to him. Yitro notices that Moses must sit all day and deal with the people...Levi Yitzhak (nineteenth century Hasidic rabbi) ignores the verse in which Moses explains that he is rendering judgment in legal cases and develops a spiritual interpretation of Moses' actions, one which flowed out of his own life and, in a lesser sense, flows out of the life of all who do religious counseling...[I]f one is a great zaddik (righteous man), he can elevate their souls by his speech with them...To 'rehabilitate' means to reach into the soul of another, by meditation, and to raise that soul from its current level of spirituality to a

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<sup>29</sup> David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: the Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2004), 17.

<sup>30</sup> Yitzhak Buxbaum, *Jewish Spiritual Practices*, 1<sup>st</sup> Jason Aronson Inc. ed.(Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc.,1990) 670.



higher one. This is the kabbalistic (mystical Jewish spirituality) concept of tikkun (meaning repair in Hebrew).<sup>31</sup>

*The Godbearing Life: the Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* has a section in the introduction of the book entitled “Tending the Soul as a Paradigm for Ministry with All People.” “Tending to the souls of the young taught me how to listen more deeply to the needs of people – all people—young and old alike. Ministry that addresses adolescents’ most deep-seated, acted-out passions touches something fundamental to being human, not just fundamental to being a teenager. All of us long for a god, something trustworthy toward which we can direct our entire being.”<sup>32</sup>

Soul friends don’t advise as often as they listen and sift through our life experience with us. In this respect, they act as informal spiritual directors who intentionally partner with us in the quest for deeper communion with God...Soul friends come to us as a gift from God when we discover another heart that beats in a similar cadence with ours.<sup>33</sup> “Spiritual friends are people who pull us toward God.”<sup>34</sup>

In the book *Your Soul’s Compass: What is Spiritual Direction*, Dr Joan Borysenko gives an excerpt from her conversation with the following sage.

Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi...describes spiritual guidance as the teaching that comes from the inside, as an intuitive ‘knowing’ for which we have no words, but have to experience... ‘There’s so much noise today in the world, it’s hard to go to the place where the mind is so clear that it can listen to more subtle places. So we have to go and calm the mind so

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<sup>31</sup> David R. Blumenthal, *God at the Center: Meditations on Jewish Spirituality*, 1<sup>st</sup>. Jason Aronson Inc. ed. (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994) 54.

<sup>32</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: the Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1998), 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 125.

we can really listen in order to be able to hear...That's when you have INTUITION-and I like to spell it out-the teaching that happens inside.'<sup>35</sup>

In *Spiritual Direction: A Path to Spiritual Maturity* by Robert F. Morneau,

“Spiritual direction is an interpersonal process of growth in which God’s call is heard and responded to in faith.”<sup>36</sup>

In *The Godbearing Life* Dean and Foster contrast definitions of spiritual direction between Patrickson and Edwards as follows. “Eugene H. Patrickson writes, ‘Spiritual Direction is the act of paying attention to God, calling attention to God, being attentive to God in a person or circumstances or situation...It notices the Invisibilities in and beneath and around the Visibilities. It listens for the Silences between the spoken Sounds.’”<sup>37</sup>

“Tilden Edwards describes spiritual direction...from a different perspective. He contends that spiritual direction is not problem solving focused on oneself. ‘Rather, it is the opportunity to drop into the subtle, mysterious energy of the Spirit.’”<sup>38</sup>

*Spiritual Direction: a Handbook for Seekers* by John Daniels explains that “[s]piritual direction is a philosophy, method and practice with a clear set of values and goals for the human journey to fulfillment.”<sup>39</sup> “While the term spiritual direction gives the

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<sup>35</sup> Joan Borysenko and Gordon Dveirin, *Your Soul’s Compass: What is Spiritual Guidance?* (Carlsbad, Calif.: Hay House, 2007), 207.

<sup>36</sup> Robert F. Morneau, *Spiritual Direction: A Path to Spiritual Maturity* (N.Y.: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1998), 79.

<sup>37</sup> Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life*, 143.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> John Daniels. *Spiritual Direction: a Handbook for Seekers* (Lincoln, Nebr.: iUniverse, Inc., 2005) 2.

impression of having a specialized focus on the soul life of a person, its true concern is with the self in its totality.”<sup>40</sup>

In some circles Spiritual Direction has become a politically incorrect term. The use of the word ‘direction’ implies that the director knows more than the directee. However, that is the standard term. By acknowledging the imperfection in the act of defining spiritual direction we can be mindful not to create an unequal relationship.

Possibly an adult child scenario in which the director is an adult and the child is the directee does not hold the same cause for concern. Although I do not want to discount the wisdom of a child, the inherent dependence of children upon adults makes for a more accurate description of the spiritual direction relationship by virtue of its definition.

Before jumping to spiritual direction for children I will review the alternate terms for spiritual direction. Spiritual guidance, spiritual companionship, spiritual friendship, spiritual counseling and soul tending are variations in the pursuit in discovering God in tandem.

Although spiritual is the word used in spiritual direction, the idea of communicating with God is inherent. For some trying to relate to a deity is troublesome. Spirituality seems to be a term that comes with less baggage. On the other hand, the term spiritual may imply some sort of dilution of the seriousness with which we are speaking.

The essence of spiritual direction is that there is a challenge or struggle or yearning to connect with the Mystery with which we most commonly call God. Finding a

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 3.

common language is part of the question. Silence sometimes works best because it requires no language and that may lessen the chances of saying the wrong thing. Two people come together with the common purpose of acknowledging and supporting their spiritual reference point. The assumption may be that those two people are actually souls here for a short time on earth in temporary bodies. Two people just showing up for one another can be profound. When one person needs the other's presence more than the other then possibly the person in need becomes the directee and the person who is giving of him or herself becomes the director.

The term the 'child within' is a term denoting the fact that within each adult is the memory of what it was like to be a child. Those memories and information affect the adult who remembers his or her childhood. As a child that adult had unique experiences and wisdom. When I was a child myself, I used to pray to God every night. I am still not sure where I learned to do that since my parents did not teach me this. Yet, I had somehow learned how to practice spiritual direction when I was a child. I had a relationship with God that made me feel connected to the Holy Listener.

My interactions with my Christian friends, visiting their houses or worship and the culture at large probably influenced me to gain this spiritual tool. Today the idea of praying in a house of worship is not the only way people connect to God. In a world where children are not necessarily being raised to be religious like their parents may have been, children need some sort of moral compass. With the rise of school shootings it is possible that children are not getting the spiritual tools necessary to process the

complicated world in which we live. From children committing violent acts to the children learning about terror there is a great need for children to have access to spiritual direction.

Simply put, this is the way that children find a point of reference outside of themselves and the world in which they live that makes sense to them and gives them a sense of security and purpose in the world. It may be the God that their parents believe in or it may be something unexplainable that gives children a sense of peace and connection in order to trust that they can live each day even though they don't know the reasons or answers for all their questions.

If I as the adult am the spiritual director for children then I approach my role as one in which I will start a holy conversation with a child or children and become a holy listener to them. Spiritual Direction for Children is about using all the tools which work for adults and applying them to children so that they also can access those tools. The tools may be in having a conversation, meditating, doing movement, appreciating nature, or praying together in more traditional ways.

#### *An Historical Perspective on Spiritual Direction*

Just as the context to my own childhood spiritual direction seemed to stem from the Christian influences in my life from outside of my Jewish family, so too it seems that the the formal study of Jewish Spiritual Direction is connected to Christian Spiritual Direction and its history.

In *Writings on Spiritual Direction*, “Even the term spiritual direction, which we are using generically to cover all one-to-one relationships for the purpose of seeking spiritual guidance, including the early master/disciple relationships of the desert fathers, probably only came into use in the sixteenth century, introduced by Francis de Sales.”<sup>41</sup>

Regarding a history of spiritual direction in *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Hausherr writes and is translated by Anthony Gythiel as follows,

The ministry of the elder to his spiritual children is foreshadowed also in Alexandria during the second and third centuries. The teacher’s role, as understood by Saint Pantaenus, Saint Clement and Origen, was by no means limited to instruction in the narrow academic sense, to the bare transmission of facts. The teacher was also a spiritual guide to his pupils, a living model and exemplar...Significantly Clement begins...by likening the master-disciple relationship to that between parent and child...There are important parallels here in...Rabbinic Judaism.<sup>42</sup>

The footnote reference is from Sanhedrin 19b of the Babylonian Talmud. “‘When aman teaches the son of another the Torah, Scripture treats him as if he had begotten him.’”<sup>43</sup>

In *Abba, Give Me a Word* by L. Roger Owens “You will learn about the early Christian monks who left the cities after the Roman Empire had become Christian and

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<sup>41</sup> Jerome M. Neufelder and Mary C. Coelho, eds., *Writings on Spiritual Direction: By Great Christian Masters* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Seabury, 1982), xiv.

<sup>42</sup> Irene Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East (Cistercian Studies Series, No. 116)* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1990), ix

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xxviii.

fled to the Egyptian desert...They went to the desert to find God, and they realized they needed each other to do it...”<sup>44</sup>

[A]bout the fifth and sixth-century, saints of Ireland transformed the pagan Celtic practice of having a soul-friend, an *anam cara*, into Christian friendships...”<sup>45</sup> In the sixth century there was a spiritual friendship between St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. In the sixteenth century St. Ignatius of Loyola founded the Jesuits, “...who assigned to a spiritual director the role of helping someone on a silent retreat interpret the Scripture with the imagination.”<sup>46</sup>

“Spiritual direction was largely the business of monks and nuns and priests and the people who came to see them....In the past fifty years Protestants have begun to discover the practice of spiritual direction...”<sup>47</sup>

Although Buxbaum points out how rebbes counseled others to have a religious companion or friend<sup>48</sup> and mention is made by Blumenthal on the torah reference of Yitro (aka Jethro) counseling Moses<sup>49</sup>, Christianity presented a unique history of Spiritual Direction as a formal more far reaching endeavor.

From the information presented above regarding a formal history of spiritual direction, it was predominantly Christian. Christians found the spiritual direction

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<sup>44</sup> L. Roger Owens, *Abba, Give Me a Word: the Path of Spiritual Direction* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2012), xiii.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., xiii-xiv.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., xiii-xiv.

<sup>48</sup> Buxbaum, *Jewish Spiritual Practices*, 670.

<sup>49</sup> Blumenthal, *God at the Center*, 54.

relationship important in connecting to God, reflecting on one's self and engaging in textual study. The unequal nature of the relationship is acknowledged and even sought after. An elder would minister to his spiritual children. Hausherr<sup>50</sup> documents the teacher's role in spiritual direction as a master-disciple or similarly as a parent and a child.

Tilden says that the term spiritual direction is probably connected to the master/disciple relationship of the desert fathers in the sixteenth century<sup>51</sup>. Owens refers to an earlier spiritual friendship in the sixth century between St Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Owens also says that Protestants have rediscovered the practice of spiritual direction in the past fifty years.<sup>52</sup>

### *Jewish Spiritual Direction*

In 2003 an article entitled "For Jews, an unusual way to foster spirituality the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College borrowed from a Christian tradition"<sup>53</sup> Kristin E. Holmes writes about how officials of this rabbinical school looked towards the longstanding Christian practice of spiritual direction. At the time the article was written the course of study was in its fifth year.

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<sup>50</sup> Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, xxviii.

<sup>51</sup> Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life*, 143.

<sup>52</sup> Owens, *Abba, Give Me a Word*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>53</sup> Kristin E. Holmes, "For Jews, an unusual way to foster spirituality the Reconstructionist College borrowed from a Christian tradition," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 February 2003, [http://articles.philly.com/2003-02-09/news/25449613\\_1\\_spiritual-dir](http://articles.philly.com/2003-02-09/news/25449613_1_spiritual-dir) (accessed 28 December 2012).



The article also mentions that while the Reconstructionist College was at the forefront of the movement towards spiritual direction for Jews searching for spiritual meaning, other places were following suit. “Seminaries, including the Conservative movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary and the Reform movement’s Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, have similar spiritual-direction services for their students...Meanwhile, the Lev Shomea program...at...a Jewish retreat center...has 28 students from around the country currently enrolled in its two-year study program.”<sup>54</sup>

In *Teaching Jewish Virtues* by Susan Freeman we learn about a pre-Christian view of Spiritual Direction.

Going back to the text or the torah and Tanakh we discover that Spiritual Direction has Jewish roots. God’s voice went forth to everyone in Israel according to their powers of obedience. The elders heard the voice according to their capacity; the adolescents, the youths, the children, the babies, each according to their capacity; the women, too, according to their capacity, for it says, ‘As Moses spoke, God would answer him with the voice.’ (Exodus 19:19) That is, [God would answer Moses] with a voice that Moses was able to hear....<sup>55</sup>

With the prolific books on Spiritual Direction from a Christian vantage point, a Christian background of spiritual direction seems evident. Since Judaism predates Christianity are there also roots for Jewish Spiritual Direction?

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Freeman, *Teaching Jewish Virtues: Sacred Sources and Art Activities* (Springfield, N.J.:A.R.E. Press (Association of Research & Enlig), 1999), 258-259.

Freeman points out that the expression ‘Shmiat HaOzen’ means a ‘listening of the ear’<sup>56</sup> and appears in the rabbinic ethical writings of the Hebrew entitled *Pirke Avot*. In English this work is translated as either *Sayings of the Fathers* or *Chapters of the Fathers*. This work appears in the mishnaic tract of the Hebrew entitled tract *Avot* translated as *Fathers* in English. The Hebrew entitled *Mishnah*, which is thought of in English as a ‘repetition’, was redacted by Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi from an oral tradition dating back to 536 BCE – 70 CE. Listening is an important skill in Spiritual Direction. “We call God a compassionate listener. So, too, should we be compassionate listeners.”<sup>57</sup>

In *Prophets*, Eli advises the prophet Samuel to listen to God’s spirit. Examples of spiritual guidance are mentioned in the book *Jewish Spiritual Guidance: Finding our Way to God*.

Although we can find examples of spiritual guidance throughout the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, the first formal discussion of the practice occurs in the writings of the Christian Desert Fathers, who lived in Egypt, Palestine, Arabia and Persia in the fourth century of the Common Era...Spiritual Guidance remained largely a Catholic practice (both Roman and Eastern Orthodox) until Protestants began to recognize its value in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the increased emphasis on personal religious experience. Now, at the dawn of the twenty-first-century, Jews and people of many other faith traditions are embracing the principles of spiritual direction as they seek to deepen their relationship with God.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 255.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Carol Ochs and Kerry M. Olitzky, *Jewish Spiritual Guidance: Finding Our Way to God* (San Francisco: Jossey –Bass Publishers, 1997), 11-12.

Now that we have a Jewish reference point for Jewish Spiritual Direction I will now focus in on defining the Jewish aspect of Jewish Spiritual Direction. The word Jewish relates to the people known as Jews, who are known to practice the religion of Judaism. In *Essential Judaism in a Nutshell*

Judaism is a religion of about fourteen million Jews, who live in all parts of the world. It is the ...first to teach monotheism or belief in one God. Judaism is founded on the laws and teachings of the Hebrew Bible, as well as rabbinic writings, including the Talmud and the various codes of Jewish law...Throughout Jewish history, Jews have communicated with one another through Jewish texts and contexts.<sup>59</sup>

In the book *God in All Moments: Mystical and Practical Spiritual Wisdom from Hasidic Masters*, “One of the many roles that the Rebbe (Hasidic master) plays for his community is that of spiritual counselor. In fact, some Hasidic communities (HaBaD-Lubavitch) there has developed a practice...in which the master and disciple meet privately (not unlike contemporary psychology) to discuss the inner life of the disciple.”<sup>60</sup> Hasidic masters teachings include the ‘hanhagot’ in Hebrew which translates in English to spiritual practices.

In the book written by Reb Zalman Schacter (this was Reb Zalman Schacter-Shalomi’s name before he added Shalomi) entitled *Fragments of a Future Scroll*, he devotes a chapter to The Spiritual Guide.

With the rebbe of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Jewish spiritual guide reached a high level of sophistication. Not that

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<sup>59</sup> Ron Isaacs, *Essential Judaism in a Nutshell* (Jersey City, N.J.: KTAV Publishing, Inc., 2004), 1.

<sup>60</sup> Or N. Rose and Ebn D. Leader, eds.and trans., *God in All Moments: Mystical & Practical Spiritual Wisdom from Hasidic Masters* (Woodstock, Vt: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), 126.

spiritual direction waited till the eighteenth century. Priest and prophet of old were charged with teaching the fold the deeds that they shall do. Prophets Ezra and Nehemiah were guides, not only of a nation, but also of individuals and groups. Contemporaneous with the Dead Sea community, the Pharisees (much maligned and ill-understood) were guides, ultimately forming the model for the Desert Fathers of the Christians.<sup>61</sup>

Although the word holocaust is a word that I reserve for the systemized slaughter of the Jews instituted by Adolf Hitler in World War II, Reb Zalman Schacter does choose to use that word in describing the history of Temple times and a mystical connection.

After the holocausts of the years 70 and 130 C.E. some mystics became guides, mapping the regions of heaven and hell, prescribing for their disciples the way to the former, and the best means of avoiding the latter. Later, a non-Jewish group, the Friends of God in the Rheinland, worked side by side with the Pious of Ashkenaz (Germany) under the direction of Judah the Pious of Ratisbon and the disciples he raised to continue his work. Alongside the Christian mystics, several circles of Jewish mystics operated in Spain, as well in Provence, France.<sup>62</sup>

For more information on the Jewish mystics, Reb Zalman Schacter points to the Zohar literature collated in Elijah di Vidas' work entitled *Reshit Hokhmah*. An approximate English translation of this Hebrew title is '*The Beginning of Wisdom*'.

The guide has reached a level of immense sanctity by the sixth century, especially in the circle of Safed in Galilee, where they were operating in the realm of trance and astral travel." Schacter refers to Isaac Luria and Hayim Vital, noting that a school of kabbalism formed around Luria. Hayim Vital was the chief disciple of Luria. "The power to communicate with Elijah (referring to the biblical figure) had become common among the disciples of Luria and Vital."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Fragments of a Future Scroll: Hassidism for the Here and Now* (Mount Airy, Pa.: B'nai Or Press, 1982), 17.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 18.

Isaiah Horowitz and Judah Loeb of Prague had their own circle of disciples in the sixteenth century. Schacter says that the Baal Shem Tov transformed the process. Baal Shem Tov is also known as Besht. “The Besht’s disciples and their disciples became the founders of Hassidic dynasties of charismatic leaders. Their ministry had as its central task the direction of their Hassidim who came from afar, spending weeks or years at the feet of their masters, listening to their public discourses and seeking private counsel.”<sup>64</sup>

Although the term Jewish Spiritual Direction hasn’t existed until recently, Jewish writings show how it has been part of Judaism all along. Jewish mysticism for example is a rich tradition within Judaism. Spirituality is a universal concept. Each religion expresses its spirituality in its own unique way. Spiritual Directors International asks and answers the question: What is Jewish spiritual direction? The following responses were taken from their website [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org).

The object of spiritual direction is to cultivate one’s ability to discern God’s presence in one’s life — to notice and appreciate moments of holiness, to maintain an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, to explore ways to be open to the Blessed Holy One in challenging and difficult moments as well as in joyful ones. The director serves as a companion and witness, someone who helps you (sometimes with questions, sometimes just by listening) to discern the divine where you might have missed it and to integrate that awareness into your daily life, your tefillah, your tikkun olam work, your study, your ritual practice. (*Rabbi Jacob Staub, Jewish, USA*)<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Spiritual Directors International. “What is Jewish Spiritual Direction?” <http://www.sdiworld.org> (accessed 27 August 2012).

As a student of the Spiritual Direction program offered by the seminary program of Aleph: the Alliance for Jewish Renewal, this definition well describes how I have been taught. Terms such as discernment, noticing God's Presence, witnessing another person's truth and being present as a listener are familiar terms to me in learning Jewish Spiritual Direction.

Jewish Spiritual Direction or Hashpa'ah (Divine Flow) is a process for exploring our connection with what we experience as God, Spirit, Truth- however we express and understand the Sacred in our lives. Through these explorations, those engaged in spiritual direction, try to discern the presence of the Sacred, in their everyday lives, work, celebrations, and struggles. This call explores the historic and current evolution of Jewish spiritual direction, some of the key elements of the experience, and how this sacred practice can help individuals and communities deepen their connections to God, self, community and the world. (*Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevit, Jewish, USA*) <sup>66</sup>

Also, as an Aleph Spiritual Direction student, I have had the great privilege of learning from Reb Shawn Zevit who is quoted above. He masterfully models the techniques which he uses to define Jewish Spiritual Direction. His many years of experience as a Spiritual Director, or Mashpia in the male Hebrew form, have made it possible for him to help a directee, or a mushpa'at in the female Hebrew form, such as myself, deepen my connection to God and be pointed in the direction of feeling God's Presence when grappling with a difficult spiritual struggle.

A Jewish spiritual director recognizes the spiritual hunger of contemporary Jews. Throughout Jewish history, mentors such as the *mashpia*, *chaver* or *mashgiach*, provided spiritual guidance for their settings and eras. Drawing on our heritage to create a contemporary model

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

of spiritual companionship, a Jewish spiritual director helps people to connect experiences of the holy to Jewish vocabulary and tradition, explore Jewish pathways that sustain the inner life, panimiyut, and inspire participation in *kehillah*, spiritual community.<sup>67</sup>

Carol Ochs describes her method to being a Jewish spiritual guide in *Reaching Godward*. “As a Jewish spiritual guide, my methods rely on four gifts we have all received that are as basic to the Jewish worldview as the Exodus and the wandering narrative: story, God, Creation and being in the image of God.”<sup>68</sup> Ochs explains each as follows. In the gift of story, narrative allows us to make sense of all our actions. “How we see ourselves can make all the difference, like that between being an unwanted child and ‘the stone the builders rejected [that] has become the chief cornerstone’ (Psalm 118:22).”<sup>69</sup>

Ochs explains that the Torah is our people’s story. The first component of the story is God. Ochs says

[I]n telling our own stories we are tempted to start with ourselves. If we do so, then we become the center of the universe. Instead we can begin with God in our story and then the story will tell us more about ourselves. Regarding Creation, the Bible reminds us that we ourselves are creators and that creativity is a sacred activity. Beginning with God’s pronouncement in Genesis that the Creation of the world was good, we can go on to see the connection of Creation to our own process of contributing to the universe.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ochs, *Reaching Godward*, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

“When the Torah describes our own creation, the aspect of the story that most concerns us, it adds the crucial statement that we were created in the image of God.”<sup>71</sup> As a spiritual guide...[s]he listens to people’s stories through the essential Jewish landmarks that she states as follows:

**1.** God is one. **2.** We were created. **3.** ...in the image of God. **4.** We were enslaved...**5.** ...but we were liberated...Liberation and freedom of the individual from whatever binds us are essential goals in Jewish spiritual guidance. **6.** ...and given revelation. **7.** We entered into a covenant. **8.** We wandered for forty years in the wilderness...**9.** ...and we entered the Promised Land.<sup>72</sup>

As President of the Bay Shore Interfaith Clergy Association, I had been sharing news of my demonstration project with my colleagues. At an informal coffee meeting held in a Bay Shore diner with Monsignor Thomas More Coogan of St Patrick’s Church and Reverend Alan Robinson of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Monsignor Coogan efficiently described spiritual direction as the ability to be directed by a spiritual director, in order to go beyond one’s comfort zone, for the purpose of spiritual growth.

I liked the Monsignor’s definition and proceeded to explain that in the past I would not have embraced the Christian connection to spiritual direction. In the pursuit of my passion for Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children, I had come to accept the challenge of researching Christian books for information and guidance on paving a new

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 8-10.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



way for Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. The Monsignor suggested that I relate this very story which I had shared with my fellow clergy.

In pursuit of paving a new way for Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children, I have reflected upon my own spiritual journey and surpassed my previous point of discomfort. Ironically, I have come full circle. I have realized that my relationship with God had been nurtured and supported by Christian influences in secular culture, by a Christian influenced United States and by my Christian childhood friends. Now, in my pursuit of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children I have needed to consult Spiritual Direction for Christian Children resources. Many of those resources are listed in the bibliography and appendixes.

In “What Can We Learn from Christian Theology?” by Bruce Kadden, as found in the book *Teaching about God and Spirituality: a Resource for Jewish Settings*<sup>73</sup>, Kadden writes that dialogue between Jews and Christians has increased in recent years.

...[C]ommunity leaders have recognized that each group can learn much about the other...This insight has been obvious for Christians who see the first 2,000 years of Jewish history as part of their history and who see Christianity as emerging from first century Judaism. But Jews also can learn much from Christianity, especially in the realm of theology and spirituality.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Roberta Louis Goodman and Sherry H. Bissell, *Teaching About God and Spirituality* (Denver, CO: Behrman House Publishing, 2002), 34.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

Within both Judaism and Christianity there has been a flourishing interest in spirituality. Kadden quotes Philip Sheldrake, “alongside a decline in traditional religious practice there exists an ever increasing hunger for spirituality.”<sup>75</sup>

I had related to my colleagues that the founder of Jewish Renewal, Rabbi Zalman Schacter Shalomi, affectionately called Reb Zalman, had taught the idea of deep ecumenism, meaning that it is important to respect the authenticity of diverse religious paths. At this point in my life, as a pulpit rabbi, I was able to be more open and less uncomfortable with Christian texts than I had been when growing up.

In my childhood, it had been confusing for me to be surrounded by Christianity and told that I am a Jew and therefore, ‘stay away’ from Christianity. As a five-year-old kindergartener in the public schools, I remember crying to my mother as I came off of the bus. I had left what I described as a big green donut on the bus. (It was a Christmas wreath). At the time, the public school curriculum integrated Christian holidays and songs. As I grew older, I was taught and learned all the words to most of the popular Christmas carols. They used the terminology of Jesus Christ the Lord, in contradiction to Jewish belief.

I experienced a confusing equal and opposite reaction from my mother. When I begged to have a Christmas tree like all the other kids, I was denied this request. As I searched for plants in the house that would support some sort of Christmas decoration, in order to serve as faux Christmas trees, it was to no avail. My mother would pull the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

decorations off showing no sense of compassion to my deep disappointment. In time, I resented the Christian doctrine that was infiltrating my public school education.

Although I was drawn to music as a young adult competing in voice and violin music competitions, I realized that foundational music history study would integrate Christian music such as Handel's Messiah. For that reason, I avoided engaging in formal music study. I was angry at the intertwining of what I believed were proselytizing techniques passing as formal public education.

From my father I gained the love of rabbis. My father would regularly express his frustrations of life. He never had a chance to pursue his passion in life, whatever it might have been. He alluded to wanting to study law and becoming a lawyer. I got the sense it was more about the status of being known as a lawyer, rather than as the job he worked, as a school librarian. My father did not express any satisfaction about getting up early in the morning to go to work daily, in order to fulfill his obligations as the 'provider' of the household. My father hated his job and would frequently lament to me, "I would rather be a bum in the street."

The only time my father's face would light up is when he would talk about the rabbis in the family and how he was the grandson of two rabbis, both his maternal and paternal grandfathers. As a child, my father was part of a culture in which the goal was assimilation, but confusion lingered among him and his young Jewish classmates as to what was acceptable for a Jew. When the other Jewish kids in my father's school didn't

know if a certain school activity would be in conflict with their Jewish identities, they would turn to Bert, which is my father's name, the rabbis' grandson and follow his lead.

Being the rabbis' grandson was a status my father treasured. These stories of my father's childhood and being connected to his holy righteous grandfathers Rabbi Schotz and Rabbi Fine (my grandmother Esther's maiden name) of Syracuse, New York, lifted my father's spirit to a state of joy and bliss.

In recently transcending the boundaries I had placed regarding Christian doctrine, I came to realize that the Christian sources I needed to complete my doctoral research were no longer causing me the level of discomfort I had felt in the past. For the first time in my life, I gave myself permission to open pages containing references to Jesus without feeling I was doing something very wrong. I am secure enough in my Jewish spirituality to realize that other paths do not have to threaten my path. They are merely variations on common themes of peace, love, justice and understanding. In the case of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children, the great multitude of Christian Spiritual Direction books may help pave the way. For me, there has been and can continue to be healing and nurturing on personal and professional levels.

In my spiritual journey, I realize now how much I was affected and formed by the Christian American society in which I grew up. My friends were Christian and sometimes I went to church with them. It was the only houses of worship which I attended, since my family could not afford the synagogue dues. When I was a teenager regularly nagging my

parents to join a synagogue, they finally found a synagogue that waved the first year's dues.

When I attended church, I always knew where to draw the line. Jesus is not the messiah for me because I am a Jew and that is not what we Jews believe in. I would close my ears to the word Christ, and until recently I have cringed when people have wished me a Merry Christmas. It is my understanding that Christ is Greek for messiah. Expecting me to respond with a statement asserting that Christ is the messiah, a tenet which Jews don't believe, felt like an insensitive expectation. Last year I decided to relax (with a sense of humor) by responding to people who wished me a Merry Christmas with a Happy Hanukkah, even if it wasn't Hanukkah. Since that is what I would rather hear, I just said for myself. Let it also be a moment for reflection about what we say to one another.

Now that I have established what spiritual direction is, its connection to Christianity and the emergence of an independent yet interconnected Jewish Spiritual Direction, I will now proceed to document the way in which I came to implement Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children.

## **Chapter 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In order to assess the effectiveness of Spiritual Direction with Jewish children a demonstration project was undertaken to provide 10 spiritual direction experiences (lessons) to 7 boys in the Bar Mitzvah class at the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore. I developed and taught the experiences with the assistance of the two Bar Mitzvah class teachers.

#### *Introduction to the Setting*

In the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore on Thursdays from 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM and Sundays from 10:00 AM -12:00 PM beginning the first week of February 2012, b'nai mitzvah students, which indicate the children preparing for the rite of passage that marks their moving into the realm of consciousness of Jewish Law and Custom; 13 years for boys and 12 years for girls, were taught Spiritual Direction in the classroom of the third floor of the synagogue, which serves exclusively for the education of Jewish students as a supplementary (after hours school) program, in that it supplements a public school secular education and is therefore held after the hours of the students' primary full time education. The supplementary school is sometimes referred to as "Hebrew School" due to the fact that students must learn the language of Hebrew and show proficiency.

The Jewish Centre of Bay Shore is a non-affiliated synagogue that leans toward the tenets of the Conservative Jewish movement, is called the Jewish Centre (for short) and is also known as the Bay Shore Jewish Center. It is located at 34 North Clinton

Avenue, Bay Shore, New York. The Jewish Centre has roots going back to the late 1800s when it was formed out of a Hebrew Burial Society. Oakwood Cemetery in Bay Shore contains a section with its own boundaries delimiting it as “The Jewish Cemetery” which is owned by the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore. The Jewish cemetery is part of a section of land bought from St. Patrick’s Roman Catholic Church.

In 1919 the synagogue became incorporated. The current building which houses the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore was built in 1950.

At the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore, I have served as both the Rabbi of the Jewish Centre and the Principal of the religious school for the past nine and a half years.

### *Participants*

Of the seven b’nai mitzvah students who participated in this project, four are converts to Judaism. Those four students represent a majority of the class. Essentially that means that the majority of the students are converts to Judaism.

Of the seven students, one is adopted. While the adopting mother is Jewish, this conversion was the most complicated in that a circumcision had to be performed on a thirteen year old boy. Until now all male candidates that I had helped convert to Judaism had been circumcised as a baby. A formal conversion was necessary since the birth mother was not Jewish. In adhering to the strictest interpretation of Jewish law, the boy who was adopted entered a hospital in order to be circumcised at thirteen years old. The adopting father is not Jewish.

Of the other three converts, their fathers are Jewish. The remaining three students have both a Jewish mother and a Jewish father. Two of those three students have a

mother who converted to Judaism. Therefore, only one of the students has a mother and a father who were born Jewish.

In Conservative Judaism, the status of “Jewish” is given to a child who has been born of a Jewish mother. If the birth mother is not Jewish, then the child must go through a formal conversion. This requires a Jewish ritual circumcision for boys and submersion into a body of water for Jewish ritual reasons, usually a mikveh, which is a Jewish ritual bath, used for both males and females, although at separate times according to gender.

Three of the boys who converted had a bris, ritual circumcision, as a baby, which was performed by a mohel, an expert in circumcisions, and is frequently, though not always a rabbi. The fourth boy had a circumcision in a hospital when he was thirteen years old and then had ‘tafat dam brit’, which is a Hebrew term for the miniscule prick of blood, administered by a mohel, for the purposes of entering the covenant of Israel.

I assisted all of the boys in going to the mikveh, but since I am a female, I did not witness the submersion of these males. Yet I was responsible for supervising their conversion to Judaism. One student, who had been converted by my rabbinic predecessor, I had known since I started as rabbi nine and a half years ago. I officiated at the bar mitzvah of his older brother who was also a convert to Judaism since they both have a non-Jewish mother.

Three of the students I have known for the entire nine and a half years of my leadership in the synagogue and the religious school. Three other students I have known for at least eight years. The remaining student has been affiliated with the synagogue for a little over a year.



A requirement of the religious school is that students attend as many Shabbat services as possible. Shabbat services are held Friday nights and Saturday mornings. In addition, students are expected to attend all holiday services when their secular school schedule allows. One or two families adhere strictly to the requirement, while many do not.

As the date draws closer to the bar mitzvah date, families are likely to attend synagogue services more often. Every student who has attended synagogue services on a consistently frequent basis has had absolutely no trouble mastering the Hebrew prayers. Most students who do not attend synagogue services on a regular basis require extra tutoring and struggle greatly in learning the necessary Hebrew skills needed to chant a haftarah for the bar mitzvah.

In conjunction with other denominations of Judaism, the greatest challenge for Conservative synagogues and many other synagogues is that students rarely if ever return to the synagogue after their bar or bat mitzvah. As mentioned previously, it is ironic that the bar or bat mitzvah signifies the beginning of adult Jewish responsibility, and after this important life-cycle celebration, the student neglects participating in the Jewish community known as the synagogue. Yet, providing a child with a bar or bat mitzvah is a huge motivation for Jewish families to join a synagogue.

Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children can be another reason for participating in a synagogue. That motivation is for personal satisfaction gained by putting God at the center of a Jewish education and in living a Jewish life within the infrastructure of a larger Jewish community.

There are two Jewish books written by Rabbi Salkin which attempt to communicate to Jewish families that having a party shouldn't be the only goal of a bar or bat mitzvah. In 1992, Salkin first wrote *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Claim the Meaning of Your Child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah* which was revised in 1996 and then once again in 2005. In 1998, Salkin changed the focus of his audience from the parents of the bar or bat mitzvah to the child becoming a bar or bat mitzvah. The follow up book is entitled *For Kids – Putting God on Your Guest List: How to Claim the Meaning of Your Bar or Bat Mitzvah*. In 2007 this book title was also revised.

Essentially the bar or bat mitzvah should start with God and include all the Jewish values that go along with making the motivation a spiritual one and not one rooted in a material goal. Spiritual Direction is a vehicle for bringing God back into the Jewish educational consciousness.

#### *Methods and Experiences*

My ability to implement my project was a mixture of serendipity and fortuity. Due to a teacher being fired suddenly from the religious school, I found myself looking for a new teacher immediately. Tiqvah Terroade happened to walk in the door minutes after the Education Board decided it was necessary to fire a current longtime teacher. Tiqvah became a substitute teacher for Thursdays only until the end of the semester. Koro Terraode also joined his wife sharing his many years of teaching experience. I myself became responsible for teaching all the remaining Sunday classes in the semester, with help from knowledgeable parents who knew the liturgy and prayers, when I was called away for my rabbinic duties. Although Tiqvah and Koro Terroade were loved by their

students, they did not have the experience or skill to teach the prayers needed by the b'nai mitzvah students when it came time to look for a new permanent teacher.

As we formally looked for a new teacher, I contacted a principal who decided that she herself would apply for the job. In order to consider this very accomplished principal and teacher it meant that I had to rearrange the normal schedule of teaching the students. The Reform background of this teaching candidate did not allow for her to teach our Conservative Hebrew prayers.

After much effort and deliberation with the Education Board, we decided to make Sundays the day for teaching prayers and Thursday the day for teaching everything else. At the last minute, the Reform teacher decided not to take the position. We had already hired the Sunday teacher to teach prayers only which are essential to preparing a bar or bat mitzvah. At this point we were able to hire Tiqvah back as a teacher. Koro once again assisted his wife. By this time the female students in the class had all graduated. We were left with all male students. Koro became the male role model for the class.

In my associations with both teachers, I learned that they understood the concept of Spiritual Direction and shared my passion for practicing Spiritual Direction. If the challenging series of events had not occurred earlier, it would not have been so straightforward as to have one class available for the implementation of my project. The schedule had been fortuitously arranged, due to a serendipitous teacher switch, which eventually allowed us the gift of using one class a week to devote to the pursuit of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children.

When I shared the idea of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children as my project, Tiqvah and Koro agreed to allow me to teach in their class and they also graciously

agreed to become part of my site team. We spent many hours discussing the students, how to help them connect with God, analyzing what succeeded and how we could improve the teaching and learning experience.

Tiqvah and Koro were the Thursday only teachers of the b'nai mitzvah boys of the school. As mentioned earlier, the class was an anomaly in that there were only boys at the time. The age of the boys ranged from 11 – 14 years old. Tiqvah holds a degree in Biblical Studies and speaks Hebrew. Koro is certified by the state of New York State and specializes in students with special needs. God bless Koro for all the time he has volunteered to the students. Tiqvah is a blessing for the religious school and I am very grateful for both of these teachers.

The purpose for implementing Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children is to help them develop the necessary tools for establishing a personal connection with God and to instill in them the importance of prayer and reflection. Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children was introduced through books, activities and exercises. I relied upon my many years of experience working as a Children's Librarian and as a Judaica Librarian in introducing Jewish books for the students as a way to introduce Spiritual Direction to the Jewish students. As an amateur musician with previous experience teaching Jewish music to children in a Hebrew supplementary school and as a certified health spa instructor with previous experience teaching exercise to children, I was able to also present music and movement as teaching tools.

Since Hashpa'ah, the Hebrew term for Jewish Spiritual Direction, is just recently being developed and implemented in Jewish faith communities, working with Jewish children provides an inspiring new innovation in this field of theology. The original

vision was to modify materials geared in Spiritual Direction for Christian Children. Although many books were consulted, my approach was unique by including Jewish Mediation and Jewish Yoga for example. Multi-faith materials that provided relevant spiritual practices were also introduced to Jewish students in the context of Jewish spirituality.

Spirituality can be defined as a way of knowing that is beyond the rational mind. It is a transformational tool which allows an awareness of self, a connection to the Divine, a purpose beyond our time on earth, a realization of a human soul which cannot be seen or proven, and a link to all humans who are souls inhabiting bodies for a limited period of time. The 'fine tuning' of the soul may be seen as all people's ultimate purpose. For Jewish children the context was Jewish due to a combination of: traditional texts and activities, a Jewish space within the religious school of a synagogue, and their reference point of Jewish identity.

In the book *Bar Mitzvah: A Guide to Spiritual Growth*, author Marc-Alain Ouaknin writes in the preface about a question that had an especially deep effect on him.

One of the students of African background asked: 'There is a question I've been wanting to ask for several years. Back home in Africa, when the white missionaries came to teach Christianity, I always had a lot of trouble praying and accepting this idea of Christianity because I imagined, and I think we were taught, that God was white and Adam, the first man, and Eve, and all the people in the Bible, were all white. I've always been a fervent believer, but how could I address a God who created human beings who were so different from me, and how could I read a book that kept reminding me I was not created in His image? If the first man was white, and the first woman was white, what does it mean to you, as a rabbi that I am black?' <sup>76</sup>

Ouaknin writes his response,

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<sup>76</sup> Marc-Alain Ouaknin and Francoise-Anne Menager, *Bar Mitzvah - a Guide to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Assouline, 2006), 13-14.

I answered the question by telling the students that in Genesis, man is named Adam, which comes from adama, [in Hebrew] the ground, the matter of which was 'formed.' I also explained that the root of the word adama is adom, which means 'red,' for the first ground, the ground of the Garden of Eden, was a red ground... Therefore, according to the Biblical text, man was born of red earth, and is himself referred to as red! And if, as the Biblical text specifies, man is made in the image of God, to look like God, then, as the students and I jointly concluded: God isn't white, or black, he's red! But in this case, red does not refer to the color of skin, but to the color of blood, which is appropriately called dam, a word obviously found in adam, and which refers to the questions of the interiority of life and death. It also refers to the question of responsibility in the face of life and death. Man is the infinite greatness of this responsibility. As the Scriptures put it: 'I have set before you: life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life.'<sup>77</sup>

We cannot always tell who is Jewish by looking at someone. I sometimes share the following story to make a point on this subject. I also had shared the following story with Tiqvah and Koro. It is about my interaction with an Israeli man to whom I had been introduced. Reuben, whose English was limited took me to a party and tried to show off his command of the English language by sharing a racist joke. I said, "How dare you! My mother is African American." He deeply apologized and unfortunately proceeded to tell another racist joke. This time, his target was Asians. Then I said, "How dare you! My mother is Asian." Now he was quite confused and apologized once again. Reuben got the message. You can't assume something by looking at somebody and therefore it is unwise to denigrate anybody in jest at any time.

One of the reasons my teacher colleagues like this true story so much is that one of the teachers is an Israeli Jew who happens to be Asian American as well. The other is a Jamaican American Jew. Many people have assumed the Asian teacher isn't Jewish just by looking at her. Some people may assume that the other teacher is Sephardic (with

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

Spanish Jewish roots). In fact, he is Jamaican American with an Ashkenazi (from Eastern Europe) Jewish mother.

In my undergraduate studies at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, I received a minor in Africana Studies. My teachers were Professor Amiri Baraka, formerly known as Leroi Jones, Professor June Jordan and Professor Leonard Jeffries. In Professor Baraka's class, we studied *The Negro* by W.E. Dubois. I recall Professor Baraka asking the class a rhetorical question. How do we determine if someone is Black? The professor pointed out that there are Italian Americans who have darker skin tone than certain African Americans, so it can't be by skin. Instead, he pointed out, it is by the hair.

As a woman with thick curly hair, who had later discovered that it was only African American hair salons that knew how to deal with my type of hair, it occurred to me that I was different. The women in the salons would always say that I am not White. From my hair, I was 'a mix'. On television I had noticed quite frequently that African American women had hair like mine.

During the course of the class, the professor singled me out saying I should explore my own roots, my Jewish roots. Later I would learn that Professor Baraka had an African American Jewish daughter from his first wife who is Jewish. Baraka's former wife had written a book called *How I Became Hettie Jones* (since Baraka had changed his name from Jones) about her African American Jewish experience.

My learning with Professor Baraka became part of my personal exploration of identity on the journey, which led me to pursue my Jewish roots and eventually become a rabbi. When I fill out those surveys with a box for white and a box for black, I create another box for Jewish, and fill that one in. After all, Israel is in the Middle East and

Africa is right next door. We are neighbors. We are related. Many Jews represent a ‘mix’. We live in a multicultural, multi-faith world in which many people identify as a ‘mix’, which cannot be categorized. Prayer can reflect that spectrum of diversity.

From a hermeneutical perspective, what constitutes prayer and connection to God? In the book *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* edited by Jacob Olupona, author Georges Niangoran-Bouah writes “*The Talking Drum: a Traditional African Instrument of Liturgy and of Mediation with the Sacred*”, in which he says that the text of the talking drum is as reliable as those of the written word.

While pursuing my Doctorate at the New York Theological Seminary, Professor Dale Irvin, President of the New York Theological Seminary, challenged our Multi Faith Studies class to consider the drum in the category of sacred text incorporating the above listed reference. This idea influenced me to ponder these enlightening innovations with the b’nai mitzvah class. The b’nai mitzvah students were inspired to express themselves in a prayerful manner by the integration of drums and percussion instruments into the curriculum.

For the purposes of my project, I developed lesson plans which were implemented in teaching Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. My experiment with integrating drumming into the curriculum provided valuable information about helping Jewish children connect to God and express their spirituality. The use of the drum was the catalyst for engaging this particular age group of boys, spanning 11-14 years old, with a conversation to God. Niangoran-Bouh says that “‘God in creating the world (h)as



suffered to create. What did he create? He created the Drum. Divine Drum, (w)herever you are (i)n nature, (w)e call upon you, (c)ome.’ ”<sup>78</sup>

Using Psalm 150 as our proof text of Jewish authenticity in choosing to integrate instruments, including the drum into our curriculum, I translated the following excerpts from the Hebrew. “Halleluyah! Praise God in God’s holiness; praise God in God’s awesome heaven...Praise God with the call of the shofar, with harp and with lyre. Praise God with drum and dance, with flute and with strings. Praise God with clashing cymbal; with resounding cymbals sings praises. Let every breath of life praise God. Halleluyah!”

Upon further research I located this modern translation in *From Prayers before an Awesome God: the Psalms for Teenagers* by David Haas. Psalm 150 is translated as follows, “It is time to sing Alleluia! Sing and dance it in every way possible! Bring the whole band together – Praise God with horns, with guitars and drums! Praise God with the latest dance! Praise God with our voices! Praise God with good choices and with unconditional love for one another! Praise God with everything we have --- with our entire life – living well, the best we can! With full voice, sing out! Alleluia! Alleluia!”<sup>79</sup>

Integrating drums, percussion and shofarim, which are ram’s horns, became ways in which the Jewish students could express themselves in a free spirited manner. I propose that these instruments represent a possible choice, which all teenagers living in a multi faith community, can implement as a way for engaging in prayer.

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<sup>78</sup> Jacob Olupona, ed., *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* (St Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, 1991).84.

<sup>79</sup> David Haas, *Prayers before an Awesome God: The Psalms for Teenagers* (Winona, Minn.:Saint Mary’s Press, 1998)118.

In the book *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education*, Rachael Kessler questions the experiences which nourish spiritual development of adolescents.<sup>80</sup> I like the term ‘nourishing adolescents’ spirituality’ in describing what happened in the course of navigating the b’nai mitzvah class with lesson plans geared towards Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children.

In the book *Children’s Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters*, Rebecca Nye offers six criteria for ensuring spiritual foundations. In the acronym S.P.I.R.I.T. she designates the following: Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, and Trust. Space includes physical space, emotional space and auditory space.<sup>81</sup>

Nye’s model is a way to analyze what occurred in the b’nai mitzvah class. In order to implement a free spirited music space, we realized that we had to change location. When we implemented the rhythm and drumming in class, our normal class space was not conducive to the teacher and students in classroom next to us. They could not concentrate on their own studies, due to the auditory level of the playing of the instruments.

Therefore, we walked down two stair cases to the Siben Auditorium of the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore. This large space is located next to our kosher kitchen and is used for celebrations when the community gathers for synagogue events.

Nye says that emotional space matters too. “Emotional space includes the space to be somewhat apart, to be ourselves and perhaps to have different opinions, but also the

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<sup>80</sup> John P. Miller, ed., *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education: Breaking New Ground* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 101.

<sup>81</sup> Rebecca Nye, *Children’s Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), 41.

space in which we can feel closely held and safe. This dual challenge is at the core of creating and safeguarding any spiritual community...”<sup>82</sup>

When the b’nai mitzvah students found a common calling to the rhythm instruments, the teachers and I sensed that this represented a positive emotional connection for the students. There were no bored faces or pained expressions at having to answer directed questions. This was beyond the verbal. It was an emotional and spiritual connection. There was a joy and spirit in playing instruments that had been elusive in verbal interplay.

“Being sensitive to auditory space is also about taking silence seriously. Children who choose not to speak are not spaces where ‘nothing’ is happening. Silence can be a way of saying something so important that it can’t be put into words.”<sup>83</sup>

Week by week, the teachers and I noticed who the non-verbal students were. Week by week, we hoped that they would participate in conversation. Sometimes I would specifically ask the non-verbal students for a verbal response. The one words answers seemed uncomfortable for these students. As we reflected on the classes, we realized that the non-verbal students were passionate and excited about the use of instruments in class. Their silence was transformed into expressive sound which emanated from the instruments. The instruments became catalysts for spiritual expression and communication. It was easy for the teachers and me to imagine that we were hearing the sound of the instruments that existed in the time of the original Holy Temple.

According to *The Jewish Study Bible*,

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.,44-45.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 45.

Psalms is a collection, actually a collection of collections, of poetic prayers...The origin of most of these poetic prayers is lost in obscurity, but they were preserved because they were likely used liturgically in ancient Israel, certainly in the Second Temple and in some cases perhaps in the First Temple...the English title 'Psalms' derives from the Greek psalmos, a translation of Hebrew mizmor, 'a song with the accompaniment of a stringed instrument'.<sup>84</sup>

Many of the psalms have superscriptions containing information other than a personal name. Their terms are not well understood, but some are thought to be musical directions or instruments; for example sheminith (Ps.12); ayyeleth ha-shahar (Ps.22); maskil (Ps.32). The menatzeah or 'leader' often referred to is presumably a choir-leader or chief musician. It is likely that the psalms were sung or recited to musical accompaniment. Psalm 150 indicates that music was a form of praise to God....Unfortunately the acoustic dimension has been lost, but it must have been an important component of the performance of the psalms.<sup>85</sup>

Participating with and listening to the b'nai mitzvah students in the Siben Auditorium of The Jewish Centre of Bay Shore was an uplifting spiritual experience. We heard soulful sounds in the auditory space provided. I am glad the teachers and I were open to the process that unfolded by making space for the integration of instruments into the implementation of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. Rye says "Prayer and

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<sup>84</sup> Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael Fishbane, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2004), 1280.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 1282.

worship are spiritual processes, not ends in themselves. Process honors the present moment too, and learning to be fully present.”<sup>86</sup>

The teachers and I were able to safeguard the spiritual process by integrating instruments into prayerful expression within the context of a synagogue setting. We all aspired to be fully present in the moment as the students expressed themselves freely. Playing drums was not in my original vision of how to present Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. Nye writes, “Spirituality depends on our being open and willing to go deeper. Imagination and creativity can resource this...Sometimes adults are wonderfully imaginative in the ways they present...spiritual realities to children, but this is not the same as enabling children themselves to be imaginative and playful.”<sup>87</sup>

We enabled the students to march to the tune of their own drum, as the saying goes. The drum represented the soul and the music communicated the spirit. Taking place within the context of a synagogue, with Jewish students, this was a form of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children.

Rye writes, “Offering authentic models of relating to one another is right at the core of spirituality...What features of our relationship could help here? One might treat each person’s spiritual perspective as valuable, regardless of age or knowledge.”<sup>88</sup>

I believe that the lesson learned from this teaching/learning experiment has implications for congregations at large, beyond faith and denomination. People are

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<sup>86</sup> Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What it is and Why it Matters* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), 46.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 51.

hungering for a connection to God that can be described as both ancient yet newly rediscovered.

Within the Jewish Renewal communities of Judaism, founded by Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi and now headed by ALEPH: the Alliance for Jewish Renewal's Director and Dean of Ordination Programs Rabbi Marcia Prager, drumming, percussion instruments and other instruments such as guitars and flutes are integrated into a spectrum of musical accompaniment at prayer services, enabling creative spiritual expression and G!dspark (a Jewish Renewal term for expressing connection to God) connections.

Nye writes that “[m]uch of spirituality is about a sense of ‘coming closer’ to things...Creating a sense of safe, intimate time and space is a long-term project with each group and each child...”<sup>89</sup> After spending ten weeks with the b'nai mitzvah students, we were able to create a more intimate connection that transformed itself into practical meaning for the congregation at large. Two of the non-verbal, seemingly non-participatory students, who participated in the drumming and rhythm, had also showed a high proficiency for blowing the shofar, which is a ram's horn, and a very important Jewish ritual instrument.

One of the non-verbal students joined together with a much more vocal student in practicing shofar. The nonverbal student showed more determination in practicing his skills with the shofar. On the High Holidays the regular shofar blower did not show up. Now this nonverbal student, who was a shofar blower understudy of sorts, now became responsible for blowing a majority of the 100 blasts of the shofar which is required on

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Since our building of the Jewish Centre holds 400–600 people, this student performed a very important mitzvah that enabled the congregation to fulfill their Jewish obligation of hearing the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Talk about a success story!

Three of the original seven students had prepared weeks before with the Ritual Chair Albert Beja in learning how to blow shofar properly on the High Holidays. That is time of the year when most of the congregation and the community at large is present in the synagogue. These results are not theoretical; they are about real prayerful, participatory, congregational integration.

Two of the ‘shy’ kids gained a confidence and skill that most adults in the congregation do not possess. The students’ skills that emerged empowered the students to participate in a spiritually meaningful way within the Jewish congregation at large. The teachers, the students, their parents, the Ritual Chair, the congregation and I have succeeded in supporting a spiritual goal beyond the bar mitzvah and a party.

Nye writes that [s]pirituality involves trusting. [T]rust is needed because spirituality does not usually deal with empirical evidence, visions or voices. Trust is comfortable with different kinds of knowing, and not knowing, evidence by a strong tradition in spiritual literature... It may be helpful to ask three simple questions in your practice: 1. Is there room for greater trust in God in this process? 2. Is there room for greater trust in the child in your approach? 3. Is this approach signaling basic trust in the faith (the Bible, the liturgy, our doctrines)? <sup>90</sup>

The teachers and I trusted in the process when presenting Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. We tried to keep an open mind as to what could happen in the midst of presenting the lesson plans.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 54.

In implementing our Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children lesson plans, the teachers and I were inspired by the teaching/ learning experimental style as exemplified in the article entitled “Claiming Our Voices: a Teaching / Learning Experiment” by Phyllis H. Kaminski.<sup>91</sup> After each lesson plan was taught, the teachers and I discussed what we thought engaged the students. Then, we modified our future lesson plans to meet the learning styles of the students. The method by which the students learned became a teaching lesson for the teaching staff on how to teach the students. Although the teaching / learning experiment article was feminist in nature, I substituted the notion of ‘feminist’ or ‘women’s studies’ with the learning lens of ‘teenagers’. While theology is universal, different groups and individuals within that group require teaching styles tailored to their experience.

In *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education*, Thomas Moore says, “[I]n educating for the soul, the teacher will help the student meander in this paradoxical territory, a limnality, you might say, a capacity to stay on the border between the universal and the unique.”<sup>92</sup>

In the book *Opening Your Child’s Spiritual Windows*, author Cheri Fuller says, While I’m aware of theories on the spiritual development of children...I don’t rely heavily on such theories...First, in the majority of cases, adults tend to underestimate the enormous spiritual capacity of children. Children, even at a very young age, have much more potential to know God and connect with him, listen to him, and have a relationship with him that we imagine....So we can’t presuppose....that it’s only

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<sup>91</sup> Phyllis H. Kaminski. “Claiming Our Voices: A Teaching/Learning Experiment” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (Spring 1994): 123.

<sup>92</sup> John P. Miller, ed., *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education: Breaking New Ground* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 12.



teenagers who think through what people have told them throughout their lives about God.<sup>93</sup>

Fuller analyzes James Fowler's *The Stages of Faith*, basic to a modern understanding of spiritual development. In Stage 3, entitled Synthetic-Conventional Faith:

Formal operational thinking during the adolescent years emerges with self-consciousness and the ability to reflect. The adolescent's deep hunger 'is for a God who knows, accepts and confirms the self deeply, and who serves an infinite guarantor of the self with its forming myth of personal identity and faith.' Others (peers, significant others) have great influence while teens are attempting to become autonomous.<sup>94</sup>

The drum, in addition to the other percussion instruments played, was a symbol of the catalyst which helped to empower each student to participate and to exert his autonomy. Paradoxically, each student expressed his autonomy in the context of a group. This community participation represents the essence of a 'Jewish community'.

The ultimate value of a bar or bat mitzvah in Jewish prayer, is to empower the boy or girl to be 'counted in a minyan'. Those ages are twelve and thirteen, for a girl and boy, respectively. Jewish tradition recognizes a Jewish girl as a woman and a Jewish boy as a man in the context of gaining adult responsibility. A Jewish boy and girl would now be obligated to perform the mitzvot appropriate to their gender and age. In acquiring that status, the 'woman' or 'man' is counted as part of the minimum number of adult Jews required for public prayer, which is ten.

The b'nai mitzvah students, either approaching the age of thirteen, or already thirteen years old, engaged in drumming. In the process they reframed the definition of

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<sup>93</sup> Cheri Fuller, *Opening Your Child's Spiritual Windows: Ideas to Nurture Your Child's Relationship with God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 15.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 224.

what a holy text is, by virtue of their unique participation. We learned from the b'nai mitzvah students, that this 'text' of instruments served as holy catalysts for spiritual expression, engaging the students in prayerful community. As the teachers and I experienced the passionate drumming, it was a soulful experience. We learned this new technique from the students, as we could sense the drumming and percussion instruments within our hearts, souls and bodies.

In the book *Curriculum of Love*, Morgan Simone Daleo writes an Afterword about her book. She hopes that her book provides those who teach children, practical support toward ensuring the blossoming of children's spiritual lives.

If it is true that we teach what we most need to learn, then as teachers we need to remind ourselves that we will continue to learn these very same lessons of kindness, compassion, forgiveness, love and joy throughout our lives. As guardians of these wise beings who are children, let us not assume we hold all the answers. What we can do as teachers is illuminate a moral path for those seeking a way to walk in balance through this spinning world...Let us keep our hearts open (t)o the joy of Unknowing; Our minds still in the presence (o)f Infinite Wisdom. Let us celebrate the Beloved (i)n our caring love for one another.<sup>95</sup>

Tiqvah, Koro and I reflected on how the drumming provided a way for the students, who were predominantly non-verbal, a vehicle for participation in the class. I myself was inspired to buy a bigger drum for personal use, to add to the smaller drums that I had provided for the students. I also decided that I wanted to learn more about how to play the drum, so I searched for more instructional books. Along the way, I discovered a book called the *Healing Power of the Drum*. Corroborating information affirmed what

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<sup>95</sup> Morgan Simone Daleo, *Curriculum of Love: Cultivating the Spiritual Nature of Children* (Charlottesville, VA: Grace Pub & Communications, 1996), 157.

my teachers and I had discovered with the students. “Drumming...offers a way for people, especially children, to express themselves nonverbally.”<sup>96</sup>

“The African Village serves as a metaphor of creating a non-verbal communication through feeling, hearing and listening to another. This is a group exercise, and it allows for spontaneous improvisation and creative self-expression.”<sup>97</sup>

Master Drummer Babtunde Olatunji is credited with bringing African drumming to America in 1957. His first record *Drums of Passion* highlighted the importance of rhythm in society. Baba, as he is called, provides an African perspective on the power of the drum. “The drum can help you get to your Self, your centered Self....Your spirit, the spirit of the skin of the drum and the spirit of the wood all join together in playing the drum that is the spirit of the drum.”<sup>98</sup>

“The drum provides us with an ancient form of communication, one that does not rely on articulation of words, but one that uses a much more basic language, our emotions expressed through sound.”<sup>99</sup>

Dr Shi-Hong Loh writes in the preface of the book how the drumbeats of a nearby Buddhist Temple made an impression on him as a teenager. Now as a doctor, he advocates that drumming offers something beyond modern medicine. “The drum is well known in all races and cultures...(b)ut can the drumbeat initiate some kind of direct physical effect onto our cells by its vibratory effect?”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Robert Lawrence Friedman, *The Healing Power of the Drum* (Reno, NV: White Cliffs Media Co, 2000), 112.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 19-21.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., xiv – xv.

Dr Loh points out that in modern medicine, there still are no solutions to certain ailments. One example he gives is Alzheimer's. Since I had such a good result with the b'nai mitzvah class, I decided to bring a drum to my father who had Alzheimer's. Verbal communication was frustrating for him. When I started to play the drum his eyes lit up, he started to move and he joined me in playing the drum. My father could repeat the rhythms that I played. Talking was not possible, yet hitting a drum empowered my father with communication.

'Rhythmaculture' is when a culture embraces rhythm. "A rhythmaculture is a culture that uses rhythm, dance and song in ritual form that permeates the culture of the people in that culture...The rhythms have a purpose and take the form of a ritual...A continent that clearly has a rhythmaculture is Africa."<sup>101</sup>

"The drum seems to awaken the recognition of a spirit within. Yet often the soul's calling goes unnoticed. We feed our body when it gets hungry, yet we do not see the signs and cues that our soul gives when it is hungry. The emptiness, the hopelessness within our society, serves as signs and symptoms that our collective soul needs to be fed."<sup>102</sup>

In my capacity as a rabbi and before that when I was a student rabbi, I noticed that the majority of worshippers in the congregations where I served were not having their soul fed. A core group of people would show up for prayer services, but the majority of the congregation would be absent. In preparing bar and bat mitzvah students, attending synagogue was a chore for them. I venture to say that it did not feed their souls.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 22.

Imagine houses of worship spanning the spectrum of faiths, having a drumming service once a month and inviting the teenagers. During the span of the ten sessions of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children, which incorporated drumming, the b'nai mitzvah students would ask, "When are we going to do the drumming?" In fact, that question might be the only verbal conversation that would emanate from the predominantly non-verbal students. As a rabbi, I myself feel an indescribable connection to the sound of the drum. Learning to drum in a more skillful way is a goal of mine. I am blessed to have a partner who is a master drummer!

In regards to integrating music and drumming into the curriculum, the music represented a bonding ritual of sorts where the students as a group found a common expressive community link. In *Formational Children's Ministry* by Ivy Beckwith, she writes about the power of ritual. "If what the rabbi said is true-if there is no passing on of values without the experience of ritual-what is it about ritual that gives it such power? Sociologist Erving Goffman characterizes ritual as having a 'key role in shaping both individual character and stratified group boundaries.' Ritual shapes and transforms human personality and identifies individuals within the group involved in the ritual."<sup>103</sup>

In the book *Children's Spirituality* Rebecca Nye encourages children to express their spirituality.

Getting to grips with children's spirituality means deliberately letting go of our normal criteria for development...The immediate-term view is about asking, 'How is this experience right now a positive that is developing experience of God for this child or these children?' Note that it might now have much to do with the content of the session

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<sup>103</sup> Ivy Beckwith, *Formational Children's Ministry: Shaping Children Using Story, Ritual, and Relationship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2010), 70.

or conversation. It might be more about the feel of the session....These will be key moments of spiritual learning and possible leaps in understanding about...ways of being with one another and with God.<sup>104</sup>

In regards to spirituality in childhood, Nye asks the question: Are boys different? “The boys, who appeared to be pretty disengaged, for whatever reason, are later highly focused as they pursue what sparked their interest, demonstrating that they missed nothing, and took things in at a deep level. The message about boys and their spirituality is perhaps that we should not judge by appearances.”<sup>105</sup>

In *Spiritual Direction: a Handbook for Seekers* Daniels says,

With adolescence spirituality enters the stage of dogmatic faith...It also marks a fateful crossover for the individual, from the fantasy world of childhood to the ‘nonfiction’ world of adult experience...Dogmatic faith reflects an ego identity that is both detached from animal urgencies and oriented within a system of cultural agreements. Very simply, it answers a higher psychological need for context, definition and certainty.<sup>106</sup>

Within the results, the teachers/site team and I aspired to connect to a spiritual faith within the context of the b’nai mitzvah class. Our approach was to nurture each individual identity as it emerged. The goal was to implement Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children as a form of adolescent spirituality.

The Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children lessons integrated the following methods of: discussion, Jewish Journaling, Jewish Meditation, Jewish Prayer, Jewish Yoga, listening and musical expression. The results follow.

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<sup>104</sup> Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, 85-86.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>106</sup> Daniels, *Spiritual Direction*, 43-44.

### **Chapter 3**

### **RESULTS**

In implementing Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children ten lessons were prepared, recorded, and transcribed. Three teachers were involved in the lessons; Mrs. Tiqvah Terroade, her husband Mr. Koro Terroade, and me, Rabbi Leslie Schotz. Although I usually function in a more ancillary capacity to classroom instruction in my role as Rabbi of the Congregation and Principal of the school, Tiqvah, Koro and I collaborated to instruct the students. For this period of time I became the on site primary teacher for eight of the ten sessions.

The b'nai mitzvah class was used in implementation of the project Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. The process of implementing Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children involved a class-by-class, lesson-by-lesson evaluation by the teachers and me. Tiqvah and Koro were present for all of the ten sessions. I was present for eight of the ten classes due to two travels to New York City to attend classes at the New York Theological Seminary which conflicted with two of the classes. I did however listen to all of the ten recorded sessions of the classes and transcribed all ten of the classes.

Recording of all classes were accomplished through the use of a cassette recorder. Ninety-minute tapes were used. Each class only required one ninety-minute tape due to circumstance of waiting for all students to show up to class and the taking of a break after an hour of class instruction. Due to the nonverbal element that arose with the nonverbal students the discussion with my site team after each class was important in evaluating

that which would not necessarily be found on a cassette recorder. We also documented some of the lessons by photographs. The photographs were important to showing the movement. The cassettes however did capture the music element which was the only way the nonverbal students could be 'heard'.

After each class, Tiqvah, Koro and I would discuss the success and challenges of each class. At first we would all share our immediate observations regarding behavior and participation by students. We observed what the factors were for responses from students. Subject matter, class comfort level, student skills and challenges were part of the analytic process of class by class evaluation. One theme that arose was the verbal or lack of verbal participation by the class which I would classify as Conversation. The emergence of verbal and non-verbal students became apparent after a few sessions.

Teaching method themes that arose after the realization that conversation was not a catalyst for all students was the prominence of music and movement. My original lesson plans focused on reading children's books as a way of teaching Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. Upon reflecting with Tiqvah and Koro we sensed that the movement of the yoga and the playing of the instruments were more readily accepted by the class. These techniques seemed to provide a level playing field for all students. Verbal and non-verbal students both liked to participate in this way. The students seemed to indicate they were having fun and enjoying their time together in this way.

When I had brought my guitar and sang to the class, Koro had pointed out to me that the students related to me in a new way. Somehow I seemed more accessible. That insight made me think more about the impact that music and musical expression had on the students. If the message that I was giving to the students was that I related to God



through music, then they might be receiving a deeper truth from me than the more academic material that I was preparing for them.

At this point I will categorize the teaching method themes that arose: Music, Movement and Conversation. Since the most dramatic one was Music, that one was listed first. In actuality there was a fourth theme that I did not give any academic thought to and that was food. At every site team evaluation we would joke about the motivating power of chocolate. Upon a variety of rewrites of this dissertation I came to the conclusion that food could have been a legitimate category. One of the lessons was based upon food. That was the Passover Seder. On the lesson about the Holocaust a lack of food could have been integrated into the lesson plan. My focus was upon Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. I now believe that integrating lesson plans integrating food could be given more consideration. Besides becoming more mindful of the hungry people of the world, addressing spiritual hunger on a children's level would be an interesting idea.

The strength of the students with the music elements grabbed our collective attention. From that point on I started to think more seriously about the instruments. The natural reference point was from the Psalms which is part of the daily liturgy of Jewish prayer. Psalm 150 includes the Levitical tradition of praying with instruments. That was my prooftext. The wisdom of the students had pointed towards the text.

The results of each class were evaluated to determine what the focus of the next class would be contingent upon the responses of the students. In regards to teaching prayer Tiqvah, Koro and I evaluated the various methods of teaching prayer. We read abbreviated psalms designed for children, encouraged discussion and journaling. Through movement we implemented Jewish Yoga and praying to the psalms with the entire body.

Lastly we used the percussion instruments including the drums and the shofar as a way to pray Psalm 150. The instruments were the most popular, then movement and lastly journaling and discussion.

The results revealed that it could be a catalyst to integrating the spiritual connection which is the essence of the internalization of communication to and from God. Spiritual Direction is a personal experience with communal reverberations. In a multifaith world moral lessons exist beyond religion or religious denomination. What we all have in common is God.

In the book *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children* by Wendy Mogel, she offers a concept of God in chapter ten entitled: “The Blessings of Faith and Tradition: Losing Your Fear of the G Word and Introducing Your Child to Spirituality.”<sup>107</sup>

One of the ways in which I was surprised was in that all of the students did not question the existence of God. Speaking about God seemed to be a natural conversation.

The verbal students revealed to me their ability to talk about Spiritual Direction and provide insights about their relationship with God.

However, the most initially dramatic change in behavior seemed to occur with Norman. Norman was the newest member of the class and both Tiqvah and Koro and a previous Sunday only teacher had remarked how he rarely participated in class. He seemed shy, unmotivated and sometimes his attention seemed diverted.

When I arrived to teach the class I noticed that Norman was responding to my questions. His remarks tended to be sarcastic and socially odd. Yet I genuinely

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<sup>107</sup> Wendy Mogel, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children*, Reprint ed. (New York: Penguin Compass, 2001), 237.

appreciated the wisdom that Norman provided. Norman had the ability to say what many people would only think. My goal in implementing Spiritual Direction was to provide a non-judgmental space where students could feel comfortable sharing whatever was on their mind. I also found Norman's off beat remarks to be entertaining as well as insightful. I liked what I sensed as a rebellious spirit to Norman. There was a point in which the teachers and I had concerns if we were teaching Norman that irreverence was acceptable. This feedback from Koro made me more mindful.

An original afterthought on my part to bring chocolate as a way of showing that learning is sweet became a well-received part of the class. It became part of a persuasive tool in modifying behavior. In the case of Norman and his love for the chocolate I did suggest to Norman a little more thought in some of his replies. This seemed to be effective.

In my research **Results From Class on Thursday February 2, 2012** (see Appendix D), Brian tells us that Spiritual Direction is guidance...[and]following your own direction. This type of answer challenges the need of anthropomorphism.

Mogel quotes Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz who says, “[W]e have so much difficulty with the concept of God. Part of the problem...is a consequence of our need to anthropomorphize.”<sup>108</sup>

The b'nai mitzvah students were not only introduced to a personal Spiritual Direction but were able to experience a Group Spiritual Direction. In **Results from Class on Thursday February 2, 2012** I explained that what had just happened with Brian was

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<sup>108</sup> Mogel, *Blessing Skinned Knee*, 239.

something that could happen in Group Spiritual Direction. One person would share and the group was there to support that person.

Brian had shared his personal struggle of going to a mental hospital. As a group we became Yisrael which is Hebrew for Israel. Israel is both the name for the Jewish people and for their homeland. The meaning of the Hebrew Yisrael is one who struggles with God. This is the name patriarch Jacob receives after struggling with an angel of God. If we choose to we can experience God in the personal struggle. Sharing that inner struggle in a group becomes a form of Group Spiritual Direction.

Author Mogel quotes Steinsaltz as follows,

We lower God and called God 'he' [or 'she'] not because God is like a person but because we only know how to express things in human terms. As children, we envision an old white guy with a long beard sitting on a throne up in heaven. He makes the world in six days flat, creates a gigantic flood that swallows up everything but one little floating zoo, splits the sea in the nick of time, causes manna to fall from heaven...and finally God hands over all the laws anyone would ever need to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Bible's vivid, magical stories and good-guy-versus-bad-guy themes suit the way children's minds work beautifully, but the action hero-sorcerer version of God gets stale pretty quick for adults...<sup>109</sup>

As children prepare to transition from children to adults, their understanding of what God is must be strengthened. It is critical for a Jewish teenager who will be entering into an adult Jewish status to connect with God in a meaningful way.

Mogel continues to quote Steinsaltz as follows,

In Judaism, doubting God is built into the theology. The word Yisrael literally means 'person who struggles with God.' Abraham Joshua Heschel once wrote that Judaism does not ask its followers to take a leap of faith, it asks them to take a leap of action. You aren't expected to work out your theology before you begin to live a Jewish life; *na'aseh venishmah*---'you will do and you will understand'...From your actions, you begin to make order and find meaning. From your actions, you begin to learn God's

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

wisdom and see the mark of God's touch...A medieval proverb says, 'If I knew God, I would be God.'<sup>110</sup>

In the context of a supervised classroom lesson plan, the b'nai mitzvah students had the unique opportunity to be witnesses to the struggles of a fellow classmate. They were able to be present to a very real struggle. In their listening they were doing. Their presence represented God's presence. We are each created 'b'tzelem Elokim' which is a Hebrew phrase meaning that we are all created in God's image. The students were able to be Godly in their behavior and action. In being Holy Listeners, the b'nai mitzvah students were able to know God.

As a congregational rabbi I know that it is this kind of support that bonds a congregation together. People want to know that others are there for them in their time of need. In Leviticus chapter 19 verse 8 the Hebrew is "V'ahavta l're'akha kamokha" meaning "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself" or 'treat others as you wished to be treated.'" This famous quotation from Torah goes beyond Judaism. It is basic human compassionate behavior. Compassion is not just for grown ups. Let our children experience compassion in the classroom.

Mogel quotes Rabbi Harold Kushner in challenging us to think about God as a verb. "Rabbi Harold Kushner, the author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, writes 'Little children don't need theology, they need to meet God.' The best way to introduce your child to God is to point out what God does."<sup>111</sup>

God is a listener and the b'nai mitzvah class became part of a Group Spiritual Direction class of holy listeners reflecting God and becoming the reflections of God that

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 243.

they are. This kind act of holy listening strengthens the character of these young listeners as they prepare to grow and change into responsible Jewish adults in the world. Mogel quotes Kushner saying “To meet God we have to be like detectives and look for clues. Just as a candle hidden from view sheds its glow all around, we can see God in God’s reflection: in the good things people do for one another, in the miracles of nature, in our ability to change and grow.’ ”<sup>112</sup>

In Mogel’s book Kushner says that Judaism provides a legacy of teaching and ritual that has proven to be both profound and practical to him. Mogel quotes Kushner as follows, “You and your family may choose a different path than that of your forebears, but if you don’t want to get caught up in the anxiety, materialism, and competition all around us, you must choose some path to walk on with your children. You must name it, follow it, and plan the curriculum for their spiritual education as thoughtfully and intelligently as you plan their academic education.”<sup>113</sup>

When I had acted as supervisory guide to Group Spiritual Direction I asked the group to offer words of support to Brian. In the process of participating in Group Spiritual Direction one of the students acknowledged that Brian’s struggle had emanated from the challenge of being Jewish within the public school system. The students themselves processed this information for themselves.

In the Results listed above Norman points out that Brian is a Jew saying, “even though he’s a Jew.” Anthony responds that we (meaning the class) are all Jews! From this

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 258.

Group Spiritual Direction experience the students then are encouraged to take personal time to write in their journals.

From *Beginning Spiritual Direction* David Rosage says,

Keeping a spiritual journal is a long stride toward self-knowledge, spiritual growth, healing and maturation...an invaluable technique in helping us to deepen our relationship with the Lord. A written record furnishes us with some concrete material which we can personally evaluate and share with a spiritual director...Writing down our observations along our spiritual pathway is one of the many ways God communicates with us. In other words, a journal becomes part and parcel of the journey.<sup>114</sup>

Before I elucidate further I must make a confession. From the moment I started writing this conclusion I lost my father. I took off a week of writing to sit shiva, which is a Jewish mourning practice that lasts for seven days, to mourn the loss of my father who influenced me greatly in my spirituality. As a child my father and I had very philosophical conversations about the world in which he asked my opinion on the challenging issues that exist in the world. Since my father died recently, I had to go back to the Acknowledgements Page of this paper. The symbol z”l was added after my father’s name to indicate that now my father exists only in memories but not in a physical body.

The essence of what I am trying to say is that we bring our full selves to every interaction. In writing this paper I bring my full self and my ever changing experience. When we prepare to talk to God or pray that God gives us the answers we seek, we must also bring our authentic selves and acknowledge where we are that day, that hour, that moment. This is something that children and adolescents seem to possess naturally. That

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<sup>114</sup> David E. Rosage, *Beginning Spiritual Direction* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Publications, 1994), 137-139.

is why Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children is such a logical next step in the education process.

In the book *The Blessing of a B Minus* by Wendy Mogel she says that it's not easy to convert your teens' struggles into blessings as follows.

It requires both insight and courage. The Hebrew word for Egypt is *mitzrayim*. It means a narrow place. The Jews escaped from Egypt and were *b'midbar*, in the desert, the wilderness, traveling with no guarantee of what would be on the other side. The new and better land was only a promise. They had to have faith in their leader Moses, and in an unknowable future. Adolescence, too, is a time of change with no blueprint or guarantees. It's tempting to think that we should protect teens during the desert crossing of adolescence. But that's not our job. Our job is to guide them through it.<sup>115</sup>

The word *mitzrayim* reverberated for me personally in the loss of my father and that is why I share it now. That is the kind of openness of heart that is necessary in teaching children including b'nai mitzvah students. Be real so that they can feel open to share who they are with you. My father is with me now guiding me.

I believe that our mission is to help guide children spiritually and to provide them with the tools to guide themselves and others. I think what I am proposing is a globally relevant type of common sense. Sometimes it just takes naming an idea for it to become obvious. Essentially Jewish schools may have been integrating permutations of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children all along. It just didn't have a formal name. By naming it, in this case Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children, then we can elevate the idea to an academic status. From that point research can be built and the tools for teaching it can be implemented.

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<sup>115</sup> Wendy Mogel, *The Blessing of a B Minus: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Resilient Teenagers*, (New York: Scribner, 2010), 6.



If ‘our relationship with God’ could be a nutshell definition for Spiritual Direction then ‘children’s relationship with God’ is how I would define Spiritual Direction for Children. Although this project focuses upon Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children, I have also integrated resources which are Multifaith in nature. My pursuit of a Doctorate of Ministry in Multifaith Studies has influenced not only my rabbinic pulpit for adults but also for children as well.

Regarding the **Results from Class on Thursday February 2, 2012** listed above on the subject of journaling, Anthony expressed himself in his journal by drawing a picture of a book of prayers. For Anthony the idea of praying was referenced by drawing a book. His spiritual reality included real nourishment as he included a dancing banana above and a muffin underneath. We are physical human beings who require food. We are spiritual beings within a physical body. The drawing referenced this reality in a light hearted way.

Brian chose to write about the biblical story of Adam, Eve and eating from the forbidden fruit. Brian says that the snake deceives two people, obviously referring to Adam and Eve. It is the snake who speaks in Brian’s journal with the words “Eat the fruit.” Since it was Brian who had early shared his personal pressures in the world leading to treatment in a mental hospital, it seemed like a good sign that Brian was able to find a biblical correlation to the negative influences that exist in the world and be able to express it through the snake.

**Results from Class on Thursday February 9, 2012** gave us the opportunity to integrate student Melvin who had been absent previously. The presence of a student who had not been present the week before gave us (Teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade and

myself) a unique opportunity. We were able to observe, to compare and to measure a difference in response from Melvin to the students who had been introduced to Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children only the week before.

In light of the devastating shootings that occurred in the Newtown, Connecticut school involving the death of many young children it is important to analyze the presence or lack of a spiritual consciousness in a violent world. I remember studying in rabbinical school in 1999 when we first learned about the shooting of students killing other students in the Columbine school system in Colorado. In response to this high school massacre of those students my rabbinical professor remarked that students have lost their moral compass in the world. Although I don't remember my rabbinical professor's name his words imprinted onto my spiritual consciousness and have guided me to speak up about how to help students spiritually. Bullying in schools has become a hot topic.

Comparing journal expressions from one week to the other brought with it an interesting shift from one of violence to one of compassion. Melvin was the barometer of sorts. Only the week before Norman had drew a picture of someone being killed by a car.

In **Results from Class on Thursday February 9, 2012** Norman now cares about saving the world. He cares that global warming can lead to deaths and wants to know what to do in order to help others. Norman internalizes this sense of compassion on such a deep level that he goes on to compete in his school's first ever essay contest and win on the subject of Global Warming.

An argument can be made that by allowing Norman to express his violence in a journal and still be accepted, he uses this acceptance to focus upon another part of

himself, his compassion. Norman was given the spiritual tool of introspection to get in touch with the negative and positive potential of his human soul.

Norman's journal entry in the second week of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children had the words: "Good Deeds, Being nice, Being helpful, Being responsible." His drawing was of a polar bear with tears streaming down its face. Next to the picture is a person who has died from global warming. Last week Norman showed an angry person with a cane getting run over by two people smiling at their decision to kill the man.

This week is Melvin's first time expressing himself in a journal. He voices that he is not comfortable but I reassure Melvin that he has permission to write whatever he wants in his journal. Melvin chooses to draw pictures of a man with a choice of many rifles. However, when Melvin is directed to write about helping the world he chooses positive things including planting a tree, doing chores, listening to parents, not fighting with siblings, feeding pets, being nice, helpful, cleaning beaches, donating charity and helping neighbors.

A student who had been present in both sessions seems to be influenced by Melvin's presence. David's first picture is a very nice picture of a man or a boy. With Melvin sitting next to him, David's pictures transition to a focus on guns.

This week Norman's resistance to yoga has changed. He requests that the class be able to do yoga. In addition to discussion, journaling and movement, music had been peripherally integrated into the lesson plan. It was this tool that seemed to be the most powerful and relevant catalyst for those who did both; those who did respond and those who did not respond to the spiritual tools so far. It would not be evident to the

teaching team, until after a few lessons had passed, and the passion for expression through music was evident.

Due to the popularity of the drumming that arose out of musical expression Psalm 150 was chosen as the prooftext for Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. At this point the teachers and I notice that the physical involvement of Jewish Yoga is motivating a quiet student named Patrick to express himself verbally. In order to engage in the physical movement of Jewish Yoga, Patrick is learning the Hebrew letters. By the way, when the students of the school recently drew pictures to comfort me on the loss of my father, it is Patrick who has written two lines in Hebrew of the Mourner's Kaddish. Although it is only Patrick and Norman who have not graduated yet, it was still impressive to have Patrick show his mastery over all the students of the religious school in this manner.

A clue that arose to the importance of instruments in prayer was when I asked if it was possible to pray using instruments. From Melvin's first participation in the class of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children Melvin emphatically agrees that it is possible to pray using instruments and adds that prayer is communicating with God. At the Jewish New Year that occurs seven months later Melvin is motivated to blow the shofar for over four hundred congregants in synagogue.

During the many months before the Jewish New Year, Melvin has formally converted to Judaism by enduring a medical circumcision at the age of thirteen years old in the hospital, participating in a procedure with a mohel later, submerging in a Jewish body of water known as a mikvah and attending workshops on how to blow the shofar. Melvin is only able to perform this highly respected honor of blowing shofar due to all

his efforts and building upon his gift of being able to master the very difficult instrument of the ram's horn called a shofar.

With awe and amazement, I was so moved by Melvin's passion and dedication that it brought tears to my eyes over the many months that I witnessed the blossoming and maturing of the fruits of our labors in teaching Spiritual Direction to Jewish Children. In participating in the teaching of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children my own connection to God was strengthened. This student who had started out as a barometer of the possible transformation from violence to spirituality had shifted his spiritual connection with profound implications for the congregation at large.

In **Results from the class on Thursday February 16, 2012** Melvin remarks that he doesn't think a person can talk to God. What he seems to really mean is that God can't hear a lot of people talking to God at the same time. Another student pointed out that God can speak through objects. Teach Tiqvah Terroade affirms that you can talk to God through nature or another person.

When students were paired together to discuss what God is and if God thinks about them, Darren said that God is unimaginably awesome. Norman said that God couldn't understand him and that he was hungry. This condition of being physically hungry became an important part of the class. It is hard to concentrate on spiritual matters if you are hungry. Some religious occasions call for fasting but in the context of a classroom situation we realized that being hungry was an important concern of the students. In retrospect I should have integrated a lesson on the hungry people of the world but it just didn't occur to us to integrate this issue into the lesson plans. However, it does

become an interesting point of reference when the students are asking God for food and seeing their reactions when food is provided for them.

Discussions with the students regarding whether God hears prayers was common. Psalms 28 and 32 were used to provide a context for questions regarding whether God listens and forgiveness respectively. When it came time to write in the journals Norman drew a picture of a person crying saying that he is hungry. When I came to collect the journals I brought food. I had been absent for the class and did not know what had transpired. However, when I arrived Norman communicated that he amazingly thought his prayers had been answered. That was a pivotal moment in that Norman had been so resistant to thinking that God would ever listen to him or answer one of his prayers.

Other students had also drawn pictures of food indicating that they were hungry. Darren and Anthony had written to God that they were hungry and wanted food. It was just by chance that I was able to ‘prove’ that God listens. Communicating with others, with one’s self and with God is all related to each category. The journal provided a vehicle for spiritual self exploration. This project demonstrates once again the need for further academic research on the subject. Lesson plans could be developed in a way which would be specific and supervised by teachers with the appropriate level of experience in dealing with the spiritual nurturing of children including teenagers.

**Results from class on March 1, 2012** integrated the concept of ‘the journey of our lives’. In attempting to define a journey Melvin said that you have to walk and to breathe. I appreciated the wisdom of the simplicity. For Norman he contemplated the idea of breathing as a choice. From his reasoning he concluded that if you chose not to breathe

you would be committing suicide. I decided to build upon his logic and asked if global warming prevented you from breathing, is that the same thing?

The topic of this conversation touched Norman deeply. Instead of being sarcastic he became quite serious about his passion for the environment. At some point after this class Norman went on to write an essay for his public school and was awarded the first ever Essay Award in his school at a public assembly.

Reb Zalman Schacter Shalomi wrote the book *From Age-ing to Sage-ing* which lead to a whole movement built upon the wisdom of being an elder and giving back to society. Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children provides a similar potential for the world at large. Children possess a unique wisdom. It is spiritual in nature and can help heal the world. We can help nurture children and they can help heal the planet. The children of the planet are God's children.

In Judaism when we speak of 'the Israelites' we are translating the Hebrew 'b'nai Yisrael' which can be translated as either the sons of Israel or the children of Israel. By definition Jews are children. Psychology has brought to the popular culture the notion of 'the child' within. Each of us has a source of wisdom that derives from our experience as children.

In the book *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* by Tobin Hart, Joseph Chilton Pearce shares a story demonstrating how children can be our spiritual teachers if we pay attention. "A friend's five-year-old daughter asked him, 'Daddy, do you know why children are sent to the world?' 'No,' my friend answered, 'tell me.' 'To teach them to

think in their hearts, so everything goes right,’ she replied. ‘Otherwise they think in their heads and life is hard.’ ”<sup>116</sup>

In the book Professor Hart describes how to research children’s spiritual lives.

“This is not the kind of research that takes place in a laboratory instead, like the work of an anthropologist, it occurs in the field. The field includes a family’s living room, a child’s bedside, a parent’s private journal, and the depth of our own memories. The data is the experiences themselves...”<sup>117</sup>

“In spite of their inexperience in the world (or perhaps because of it), children have remarkable access to inner guidance and insight-they can often penetrate to the heart of an issue and open to an intuitive source of wisdom that provides comfort and counsel.”<sup>118</sup>

“As we struggle to understand the contemporary world, to find a moral compass, to overcome selfishness, to develop character and compassion, and to uncover our calling, we may find a wellspring very close to home, in the authentic spiritual life of children.”<sup>119</sup>

These days, messages of materialism, fame, money, competition, greed, violence, and sex swirl at children’s fingertips with the click of a mouse or the remote control. Constant streams of messages, many of which are crafted (by advertising wizards) to shape consumer desire, bombard them. School also offers all sorts of messages – a hidden curriculum- such as the value of compliance, competition and one right answer, and that authority and truth are to be found outside of oneself in the teacher or textbook...This demand for compliance without deeper understanding is

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<sup>116</sup> Tobin Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2003), 14.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 16.



‘dangerous’ according to Indian mystic Sai Baba, results in ‘arrested growth’ according to author and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, and even risks, in the words of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, ‘soul murder.’ It is a big deal.<sup>120</sup>

Professor Hart differentiates between religion and spirituality. “Religion is an institutionalized approach to spiritual growth formed around doctrines, rituals, and standards of behavior. Spirituality is the very personal and intimate expressions of our relationship with the Divine.”<sup>121</sup>

In **Results from class on Thursday February 16, 2012** I ask how God is part of the journey of our lives. Melvin says that God helps us to find our way to our destiny. Use of the word destiny was impressive. Darren calls God ‘the narrator’. Norman in his perceptive yet sarcastic manner says that God is a stalker because God is watching us all the time around the clock.

After reading the book *What Does God Look Like?* by Lawrence and Karen Kushner, Melvin says that the world is like God’s head. Darren says that we’re all in God’s imagination. Melvin adds that maybe it is we who have God in our imagination. In *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, “The ancient Sufis considered imagination- that internal making of images not present to the outer senses – to be the very way in which we are made in the image of our Creator.”<sup>122</sup>

**Results from Thursday March 15, 2012** music and movement provided insights into Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children for perceiving God through sound and vibration and mindfulness. In *Sacred Attunement* by Michael Fishbane,

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 171-172.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>122</sup> Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World*, xiv.

A second domain in which God-consciousness may be cultivated is the ear... This state may also put one in mind of God, whose ineffable Name symbolizes the fullness of sound and expression that variously conditions and constitutes all the living tones or vibrations in our world. When we hear sound this way, we may realize concretely that sound happens independently of its meaning and our limited construal of its tones. In itself, we may say, sound is the very mystery of God's voice.<sup>123</sup>

Before introducing Psalm 150 and encouraging use of the instruments listed in the psalm I had asked for any thoughts about Spiritual Direction and being a Holy Listener. Norman's response was 'being a monk'. In the book *The Artist's Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom* by Christine Valters Paintner, "The monk, a universal archetype of the search for the divine, represents everything in you that leans toward the sacred, all that reaches for what is eternal."<sup>124</sup>

For Norman the context of searching for the divine and being a Holy Listener was embodied in a Buddhist monk who is known to master the art of meditating in silence.

Within the Jewish religion we too have our own traditions built upon silence. In *Everyday Holiness* by Alan Morinis, "Limitation on speaking is built into the Jewish liturgical practice in the Amidah, the silent prayer that is the central feature of the thrice-daily prayer service.... The medieval kabbalists introduced what they called a tzom sh'tikah- a fast of silence. We ordinarily think of a fast as a time from abstaining from food, like we do on Yom Kippur. In tzom sh'tikah, people refrain not from eating but from

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<sup>123</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2008), 99.

<sup>124</sup> Christine Valters Paintner, *The Artist's Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Sorin Books, 2011), xi.

speaking.”<sup>125</sup>

Yet many Jewish spiritual seekers who have not had a strong prayer background may not know the times of silence built into the liturgy. After Norman’s point of Buddhist reference to Holy Listening, I remarked that music is a way to communicate with God. Both meditating in silence and creating music are methods of prayer that have to do with a balance of sound and breath. Morinis points out that “[S]ilence is not merely an absence of external noise; it is also an inner state that goes beyond quiet to stillness.”<sup>126</sup>

Regarding silence, Morinis quotes Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol. “In seeking wisdom, the first step is silence, the second listening, the third remembering, the fourth practicing, the fifth teaching others.”<sup>127</sup>

After students took drums, a tambourine and shofars imitating the instruments found in Psalm 150 I asked the students to write in their journals about what it was like to play the instruments.

Morinis identifies a Spiritual Curriculum. The author’s target audience is adults. However, use of the word curriculum is an educational term which could be modified for children. “Like an accountant doing an audit, when you do an Accounting of the Soul you observe your life and sort out a balance sheet of your inner being...This new awareness is

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<sup>125</sup> Alan Morinis, *Everyday Holiness: the Jewish Spiritual Path of Mussar* (Boston:Trumpeter, 2007), 145-146.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 149.

crucial to the journey of transformation....”<sup>128</sup>Transformation is also a good word to apply to children who will grow into young adults.

In the case of b’nai mitzvah children I have witnessed the inner transformation of children who turn thirteen years old. The intense preparations and stresses that accompany the process challenge the child to overcome the pressure of preparing for their bar or bat mitzvah. In the case of the b’nai mitzvah class we created our own Accounting of the Soul practice of keeping a journal in implementing Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children.

For Norman he did a great job of communicating as a child his age would. Norman labeled the experience “Indian Death Metal I played the drums”. For Norman this was a ‘God’ experience as he drew God sitting at a table with God’s laptop eating a bag of chips.

For Anthony his journal entry was more of an accounting of the soul. He drew a stick figure with a message above reading “I feel like I’m in an endless time warp between forgiveness and sadness.” Anthony wrote in his journal that it was difficult to play the instruments. For Norman playing is a pleasant God connecting experience. For Anthony not being able to play is troubling for him. Possibly Anthony’s inner turmoil prevents him from playing or having that God connection.

David writes that his lips hurt from playing the trombone, writes about forgiveness and says that praying means talking to God and asking God for help. Melvin wrote that playing the shofar hurt his lips. Patrick also says that his lips hurt. On the next

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 149.

page he has a large amorphous face with two ears, two eyes, an abstract nose and a big smiling face. Underneath Patrick writes that you can talk to God and God hears you.

Brian writes that he played music and that he feels great to be helped by God. Brian also remarks that the reading of the psalms helps provide him with a sigh of relief. He says that he likes listening to the psalms and that he learns from them. From the information gleaned from the journal entries the music and psalms seems to be a successful technique of helping the children to not only connect to God but to become aware of the biblical literature of psalms that is available for them to use in their spiritual tool box. The journaling, the music, the reading of psalms and the discussion show promise in implementation of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children.

Building upon the success of the reading of the psalms I now integrate a movement exercise of praying the psalms with the entire body. Using the book *Praying with the Body: Bringing the Psalms to Life* by Roy DeLeon, I show the students that there are stick figures explaining which movement to make in praying the psalms. Each student then created his own unique prayer movement which we named. I was able to call upon my experience as a health spa instructor to help name the movements. One was called 'Prayer Lunge.'

Since I was a certified health spa instructor I was able to navigate how to physically demonstrate the illustrations from the *Praying with the Body* by DeLeon book. All the students were eager to participate in praying the psalms with physical movement. When I asked the students if they would rather sit in synagogue or pray with their bodies, the answer was clearly what we were doing. They felt comfortable expressing themselves

with the movement of their bodies. Some of my colleagues are trying to integrate movement into prayer services. The response of these students confirms the need.

In this regard I believe there are many adults who would be drawn back to Judaism by praying with expressive movement. Although we do sit and stand for prayers in synagogue with some bending at specific prayers there is generally not much creative expression through movement. When visiting the mosque a few times I witnessed some of the five times a day prayers as being extensively physical with the prostration of the entire body. Certainly yoga is centered about the importance of balance through physical movement.

**Results from class held on March 22, 2012** included discussion about if God was present in the lives of the students, violence centering upon Jewish school children killed in France and the Holocaust. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade asked if God is present in tragedies. Melvin offered a lighthearted remark saying that maybe God is buying groceries. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade called Melvin on his answer requesting him to be serious. Melvin then said that maybe those affected by tragedies committed too many sins. Teacher Koro Terroade asked for clarification wondering if he is referring to the people in France. Teacher Koro Terroade then asks if God was present in the Holocaust and if God was present in France. Anthony responded that God is testing us to see what we will do and evaluate what this world has come to.

Melvin interjected that God made dinosaurs and killed all the dinosaurs and that they had tried to voice their protest to God by speaking to God. Anthony insinuated that they had what was coming to them since the dinosaurs had killed each other. Melvin agreed that this is a comparable situation since we are also killing each other. Of course

the students expressed themselves in teenage language which is transcribed from cassette tapes word for word in the Results section of this dissertation.

Although teenagers may sometimes express themselves in politically incorrect language it is important to pick your battles. The goal of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children is to get the children talking and expressing themselves in a manner in which they do not feel completely criticized. It is possible that the goal of a student may be to see if they can shock an adult into an emotionally charged response.

In the teen focused book *The Blessing of a B Minus* by Dr Wendy Mogul, that follows up the book *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, Dr Mogul proposes a withdrawal from an immediate engagement of response,

Detachment is a balancing act that requires both rachmanut (compassion) and tsimtsum ('contraction of the divine energy'). This is an effective spiritual model for relinquishing control over children based on God's relationship with us, his children. According to the Jewish mystics, originally everything was God; God's light and energy filled up the entire universe. But in order to make room for the world to expand, to fill it with plants and animals and people, God had to inhale, to pull back and contract his power...As leaders of our children, it's essential for us to step back...We practice rachmanut and tsimtsum...By taking a deep breath and with drawing, you make space for your child to grow.<sup>129</sup>

When Tiqveh shared verses from Isaiah that mention heaven and earth, it evoked a response of the pairing of heaven and hell from Darren. Christian concepts gleaned from popular culture became questions for clarification. Darren wanted to know more about the devil too. Tiqveh was able to teach the difference between hell and the Hebrew She'ol and between the devil and the Hebrew satan.

At this point the playing of instruments has become a much anticipated part of class instruction. Due to the importance of allowing students the space to express

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<sup>129</sup> Mogel, *Blessing B Minus*, 7.

themselves fully with the instruments we allocated the more soundproof downstairs area as a place of free expression. When Tiqvah and Koro brought the students downstairs they played drums, shofars, and rainsticks as Tiqveh prepared to sing and play a song in Hebrew about peace for Jerusalem.

As Tiqvah tied the song she was preparing to play on her guitar to peace in Jerusalem and peace in the world, some students felt motivated to join in a discussion. Other students kept playing their instruments. Simultaneous discussion and playing of instruments appeared to be an evolutionary level of our Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children project. Children were able to feel comfortable with different paths of Spiritual Direction. They could express themselves with engagement in music or they could choose to share the questions or wisdom in their hearts or possibly a combination of the two. It was a fluid natural flow of expression.

It seems to me that the environment that was created could have implications for congregations at large. This model of expression and communication could be a potential tool for bringing more spiritual seekers to houses of worship or to spaces designated as holy meeting places.

For the journaling segment that followed a reading of the birth of Moses, Moses being called by God and the role of Moses as a spokesman to Pharoah, the students were invited to imagine that each one of them was Moses. What would they say to God if asked to speak on behalf of the Israelite people? What would they say to God if God spoke to them?

Anthony artistically expressed himself in his journal with the picture of a man holding a question mark in his hand as he stood by a burning bush. Darren would



question God as to why he was chosen to be a prophet. While Anthony, David and Patrick agree to go along with the task at hand, Melvin interjects a street smart response saying, “Nah Im good but thanks for the offer,” making the situation seem believably present day.

**Results from the class on Thursday March 29, 2012** began with journaling at the beginning of class. In the book *The Jewish Journaling Book* by Janet Ruth Falon is the following argument as to why journaling is Jewish.

Journaling can also be considered Jewish because of history. Some people even think of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, as a journal...[T]here are historic precedents for Jewish journaling that stretch back for centuries. For example, starting about eight hundred years ago, kabbalists kept journals in which they described practices that enabled them to reach altered states of consciousness as well as what those experiences entailed...[I]f a primary goal of keeping a journal is to help you become a better person, a more ethical and generous and self aware and kind-hearted person, then journaling is about as Jewish as you can get.<sup>130</sup>

My goal for the students journaling exercise was to get them to talk more personally about their own lives. I compared our lives to a holy torah scroll. The torah is a holy story and each of our lives can be compared to our own torah. This was a chance for the students to tell their own story.

In the book *Our Lives as Torah: Finding God in Our Own Stories* by Carol Ochs the author says that by recognizing our lives as Torah transforms our sense of who we are, what we can know, and what we can hope for.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Janet Ruth Falon, *The Jewish Journaling Book: How to Use Jewish Tradition to Write Your Life & Explore Your Soul* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Pub, 2004), xiv-xix.

<sup>131</sup> Carol Ochs, *Our Lives as Torah: Finding God in Our Own Stories* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), xiii.

Name, time of birth, birthdate, place of birth, siblings, pets, how he is different now than when he was little, lessons learned in life, who is nice to them in school, who is not nice to them in school, first learning about God and who explained God to him, were the guiding criteria for telling their stories. When it came to talking about the good and bad of school this became a natural discussion for some of the students.

Due to the scope of the criteria for telling their story each student was able to tell their stories with a degree of confidence. Their lives were subjects that they knew about and felt wise sharing with the class.

After an animated discussion of current events I read *Moses and the Burning Bush: A Story of Faith and Obeying God* by Mary Manz Simon. I point out that God and Moses have a conversation. In response to my question about how the students talk to God, Brian said that he guesses when he sleeps and dreams. Anthony also agreed when you go to sleep and Darren added at nighttime as well.

In the book *Dreams and Spiritual Growth: A Judeo-Christian Way of Dreamwork* is a quote from Abraham Lincoln as told by Ward Hill Lamon, his bodyguard.

How much there is in the Bible about dreams! There are, I think, some sixteen chapters in the Old Testament and four or five in the New in which dreams are mentioned...If we believe in the Bible, we must accept the fact that, in the old days, God and his angels came to humans in their sleep and made themselves known in their dreams.<sup>132</sup>

This book is a resource for spiritual directors integrating dreams and dreamwork. I am not aware of a comparable book geared towards Spiritual Direction for Children.

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<sup>132</sup> Louis M. Savary, Patricia H. Berne, and Strephon Kaplan Williams, *Dreams and Spiritual Growth: a Judeo-Christian Approach to Dreamwork* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), xi.

Since dreams were a reference point for the bnai mitzvah students it seems that a book on the subject would be helpful in teaching Spiritual Direction to Jewish Children.

Our hands on lesson about matzah and chametz centered upon the concept of spiritual chametz. We were trying to get the students to be introspective about their actions and make a connection that how they act connects them to their personality. With this activity we wanted to teach an introspective Jewish spiritual tool related to the holiday of Passover.

Using Proverbs we explained that a person's spirit can be compared to a lamp of God searching their inner parts. We then challenged the students to think about a scientific concept of bread rising in a spiritual way regarding the character of a person.

They caught on right away giving answers such as mean, evil, loud, and boastful.

We then used balloons to symbolize both the concept of bread rising and negative character traits that would be associated with this type of person. Students were able to physically experience what the spiritual message. First they blew up balloons. Then they wrote on their balloon one negative character trait that they could get rid of by pushing the balloon away.

Tiqvah sparked this idea by finding appropriate biblical passages and buying the balloons. We then collaborated on teaching the spiritual message and were surprised by the added layers of meaning that organically manifested itself. Ideally we wanted to bake bread to show the rising of the chametz. Tiqvah thought the balloons would be easier. They could symbolize the rising of the bread with the expansion of air in the balloon. Although we knew there was a possibility that the students might receive the message as far fetched we were not afraid to give it a try.

Not only did the students make the connection but the experiential aspect became a source of fun and excitement. Pictures were taken with each student and his balloon. On each balloon I instructed the students to write the personality of someone who has chametz. Brian wrote the word 'pride'. Anthony wrote 'frustrated'. Patrick wrote 'anger'. David wrote 'greed'. Norman wrote 'sin' with the word 'evil' underneath. Underneath the word evil Norman also wrote the word 'stealing'. Darren wrote 'uncleansed'.

Pushing the balloons away became an entertaining game. It would seem to be a beneficial teaching that getting rid of negative characteristic traits can be fun! In a more structured academic environment research could be done to see if this kind of lesson will have positive implications in the development of character from child to adult. Regardless of the longterm effects, this is the kind of activity that a student would remember as a fun Jewish learning experience.

**Results from the class on April 5, 2012** was different from other classes in that we held a model seder in preparation for the Jewish holiday of Passover. It is different in that the lesson is built upon symbolic foods. The true nature of a seder is to get the participants involved in the story so as to feel that he or she is freeing him or herself from slavery.

The main message is to teach the children who are the next generation. On a basic level we were fulfilling the essence of telling and experiencing a Passover seder. *The Passover Box of Questions Game* by Melissa and Doug offered great imaginative questions. Students were able to think about different flavors and shapes of matzah, the flat crackerlike unleavened bread that is part of the ritual food experience of a seder.

Students gave imaginative creative insightful responses in regards to the shapes of matzah. Norman said that the shape of the matzah could be a three dimensional sphere. Norman also suggested having a matzah that burns. Building upon the theme of Moses and the bush that was not consumed, I added that it would be interesting to have a matzah that burns but is not consumed. Brian added that there could be a voice that comes from the burning bush matzah. Brian added that there could be a fortune cookie type matzah that would have a fortune inside.

We were able to integrate creative thoughtful exploration within the structure of the seder. The students were to engage themselves in creative speculation. At one point I was surprised at hearing Norman stutter. He is usually very confidently sarcastic in a borderline disrespectful manner. My goal was to accept Norman for who he is in order to encourage honest participation and self exploration. Norman was taking this experience seriously and in doing so his vulnerability became evident. I got to see that the real Norman is a scared kid trying to do the right thing. I am glad that he felt comfortable enough to let his good neshama (Hebrew for Jewish soul) shine forth.

Norman wanted to provide an answer as to what Passover symbolizes. After clarifying with me that I was referring to the literal name of Passover Norman said that this is because of the Angel of Death passed over the houses killing the Egyptians. Norman seemed to be aware that what we were doing was not class as usual. This was serious.

Using the questions found in the Passover game mentioned previously I asked a relevant question for today. In response to my question about how the biblical prophet Moses would lead us today, Brian responded that Moses would want to lead us to a safe

place in the United States instead of Israel. Brian felt it was too dangerous in Israel due to Iran and its nuclear technology.

The model seder was helping us to accomplish the goal of an actual Passover seder in making the story of Passover real for today. It is about struggling with the issues that are relevant for this time in history. Holidays in Judaism are spiritual tools. By accomplishing wholehearted questioning, reflection and discussion in the telling the story of the Passover seder, we were practicing a form of spiritual direction. The story of Passover is about a physical and spiritual journey and lends itself naturally to a spiritual journey.

After we symbolically took a drop of grape juice for each of the ten plagues I asked what they thought modern day plagues are. Answers included cancer, nuclear warfare, trench warfare, HIV and AIDS, sugar, and nuclear winter. The conversation digressed a bit about whether or not Iran had nuclear technology. This seems to have been an important concern of Brian throughout the project. Anthony and Norman expressed an interest on the topic today as well.

After saying a blessing over the fourth cup of grape juice I added a blessing for being free. Brian pointed out that not everyone is free. I affirmed that he is right in that slavery still exists in the world.

The **Results from April 19, 2012 class** included discussion about Holocaust Remembrance Day and participation in a Yom HaShoah (which is the Hebrew correlation for the day) service. When I asked where God was in the Holocaust Brian first said that he wasn't sure but then added that God is inside of all of us after Melvin said that God was giving us hope. A number of Holocaust survivors, Jews and others have found it

difficult to believe in either the existence of God or possibly of a loving and protective God after the Holocaust.

In the book *Arguing with God* author Anson Laytner writes that the rabbi's role has become to defend God rather than advocate for the congregation to which the rabbi serves. Laytner seems to see a stumbling block of the rabbi's ability to guide or direct due to the role of God in the Holocaust.

God could be brought to court and sued for 'breach of contract,' [and]the modern rabbi would be seen as God's accomplice, or at least God's mouthpiece...[T]he modern rabbi has ceased to serve as a genuine shaliah tzibur, a spiritual emissary of the congregation, and instead appears content to serve as the upholder of a belief system and a God whose relevance and efficacy many Jews today doubt or even reject...Perhaps I am being too harsh...perhaps I am too impatient with my colleagues. After all, they first must understand the issues for themselves before they can guide others in any direction.<sup>133</sup>

Since children of today are further removed from the Holocaust it might be possible for them to come to terms with a trustful God in spite of their understanding of the horror of the Holocaust. The Holocaust then became a reference point for moving forward to the lessons we can learn today in creating a more tolerant loving world.

When I asked if anything of the Holocaust relates to today, students responded with: terrorism, weapons and nuclear technology. When I reframed the question to asking the students about how they felt about destruction of people on a mass scale the responses were 'sad' and 'upset'. Some students said that people are picked on for no reason.

After reading parts of an interview with a Holocaust survivor I asked the students if people in general are good in the world. Darren thought there are more good people than bad people but wasn't sure. We then talked about what makes a person good or bad.

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<sup>133</sup> Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: a Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998), 239.

Darren said that a good person doesn't pick on people and instead tries to help them. The students seemed to give answers showing that it is a person's behavior that makes him or her good or bad. Patrick then said that he thought there are more bad people in the world because people are getting picked on and others aren't helping. David agreed arguing that if there are nice people they are not showing it and the bad people are showing that they are bad. This was quite interesting in that Patrick and David rarely volunteer to speak up in class. This subject motivated both to deviate from their usual nonverbal participation.

After I had read more of the testimony of the Holocaust survivor named Gloria Gantz as transcribed by post bar mitzvah student Matthew Mantione on August 19, 2009 and published for his bar mitzvah project at the Jewish Center of Bay Shore on October 18, 2009, we discussed the idea of tolerance and bullying. Students said that hate and discrimination can affect anyone.

Moving on and praying were answers on how to heal after the Holocaust. On the subject of praying the students were very excited to talk about a popular culture prayer terminology called 'Tebowing' based on the football player with the last name of Tebow who kneels down and prays on the football field.

At this point students were told to take out their journals. Their assignment during the Holocaust service was to write down one thing that seemed important enough to go in their journals. David wrote that praying means talking to God and asking God for help. Darren wrote not to forget and not to trust. On another page Darren wrote that it was sad that so many people died because of their nationality. Melvin wrote that a lot of people



died. Anthony wrote that God was probably on the mind of many people who died in the Holocaust.

I think is a profound that Anthony thought about what people who were in the Holocaust were thinking. To emphasize his point Anthony drew a picture of person's head with the word 'G-D' inside. Underneath were the bullet points of 'important, sad, remembering'. Underneath the bullet points Anthony wrote that it was a very important service to remember those who were in the Holocaust. Patrick wrote that six million Jews were killed for no reason. Brian wrote that the Holocaust was a horrible, sad, evil and depressing thing during World War II in which six million Jews and many more killed.

After the Holocaust Service I continued with a lesson in the lobby of the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore lobby which houses a torah scroll saved from Kolin, Czechoslovakia which the Nazis had confiscated to show that Judaism is a defunct culture which no longer exists.

An editor of *Paths of Faithfulness* Joshua Saltzman quotes author Robert Gibbs talking about the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas.(from Gibbs, Robert. "Blowing on the Embers: Two Jewish Works of Emmanuel Levinas: A Review Essay." *Modern Judaism* 14 (1994): 99-113.),

For Levinas the crisis of Nazism requires that Jewish thought be made available for the general culture, and that Judaism can offer what is most lacking. [It is]... [t]he insight into a moral responsibility which extends beyond the bounds of my own action. What Europe and the West most need to learn is that I am responsible even for the actions that are perpetrated against me, even for the violence of my persecutors. Levinas discovers this teaching of radical responsibility, of unchosen obligations, of a fundamental social solidarity, within the traditions of Jewish classical texts.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Carol Ochs, Kerry M. Olitzky, and Joshua Saltzman, eds., *Paths of Faithfulness: Personal Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV Publishing House, 1997), 139.

Although the torah scroll recovered from the Nazis on display in our synagogue is a teaching tool rather than for official torah reading, we do have kosher torah scrolls that we do read from.

Saltzman sees the study of torah as a spiritual act. This author makes clear that Levinas is his inspiration. “Levinas finds the key to spirituality in the recovery of Jewish texts and in their study.”<sup>135</sup>

For Saltzman the interpretation is key. “Another aspect of the spirituality of Talmud Torah revolves around the act of interpretation itself.”<sup>136</sup>

Saltzman points out the role of the rabbi. “The nexus between the rabbinic interpretive act as a revelatory moment and the rabbi’s role as teacher...is illustrated in the textual dialogue which occurs within the midrashic /Talmudic framework. The text is the site of a continual ‘dialogue and debate of teachers’ and hence allows us to enact the transmission of knowledge through ‘the teaching relation.’ ”<sup>137</sup>

After learning about the rescue of the torah scroll, we returned to the classroom upstairs. I asked what insights they wished to share. Brian said the concentration camps and quoted Anne Frank who had said ‘in spite of everything I believe that people are good.’ Brian was impressed that this had been a real quote from a girl who had perished in the concentration camp of Auschwitz. Melvin said that it was necessary to light six candles to remember the six million.

Regarding the idea of lighting candles I asked if doing that can connect the students to the idea of a soul. Anthony said that a soul is something that makes you live

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

or something that people can't see. Brian added that it's a living force or spirit inside you. Patrick also said that it's something inside of you. David said that it is feelings. Brian expounded upon his answer saying that he thinks it is the energy of our being. In the case of Patrick and David, I had to solicit responses from them by name. The other students had volunteered responses when the class was asked.

In response to my comments comparing the soul to candlelight, Anthony said that the soul is something that people cannot see. Brian said that the soul is: a living force or spirit inside of you and the energy of our being. It seems possible to classify these responses into the category of 'spiritual intelligence.'

In the book *Spiritual Intelligence: What We Can Learn from the Early Awakening Child* by Marsha Sinetar is the following definition. "What is Spiritual Intelligence? Spiritual intelligence is inspired thought. It is inspirational drive and effectiveness, the 'is-ness' or aliveness of divinity of which we're all a part. 'God' is my word of choice for the source of that fervor: 'unoriginated, immutable, eternal, self-sustained existence and creative power.'"<sup>138</sup>

Sinetar's correlation of children to spiritual intelligence seems to clarify the essence of why Spiritual Direction for Children, or in this case Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children has implications that transcend the specific category of children. "Understanding spiritual intelligence in children helps us understand ourselves, for early awakening is more than a metaphor for our deepest aspirations. The seed of promise we

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<sup>138</sup> Marsha Sinetar, *Spiritual Intelligence: What We Can Learn From the Early Awakening Child* (Orbis Books, 2000), 17.

felt in youth still lives in our own core. Not age alone but the inspirations of the Almighty giveth us understanding.”<sup>139</sup>

**Results from the Thursday April 19, 2012 class** concluded with an actual physical struggle that the students participated in. The angel of God which Jacob struggled with is seen as a direct struggle with God. This activity of having the students literally struggle with God in the spirit of Jacob struggling with God was meant for the lesson of April 26<sup>th</sup>.

However, when the relatively nonverbal Patrick spoke up that he wanted for the class to wrestle now, we acquiesced in order to demonstrate to Patrick the positive implications of making his wishes known verbally and giving him the honor of being known as a leader for the will of the group. The students engaged in a short tug of war which was repeated in the next lesson.

In **Results for the Thursday April 26, 2012 class**, I asked what would be a good way of connecting to God. Brian and Anthony responded with what could have been discarded as a smart aleck remark. Brian said a good way of connecting to God is in sleeping. Anthony said by taking a nap. Anthony brought in the logical argument of connecting to God through a dream.

Sensing that responses were generated by the fact that they were tired, this became an opportunity to meditate and relax. If a goal was to go to sleep, then we could practice silence and enter a relaxation state. This became a unique opportunity to practice reclining in silence and contemplation.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.,8.

Although the students were requesting a rest they were challenged by the quiet. There was giggling. For a short while there was a God connecting silence. In the publication entitled *The Divine Image* there is a chapter entitled

Of Pictures and Words: Visual and Verbal Representations of God” by Moshe Halbertal who says, “...Maimonides’ doctrine of the negative attributes, which holds that describing God through language constitutes an attempt to impose human categories on the divine. In fact, all that language really enables us to do is to say what God is not. The negation must lead to silence, in the sense of ‘For You, silence is praise’ (Ps 65:2, translated in accord with the rabbinic interpretation); and that silence is the fullest and most profound expression of God’s sublimity.”<sup>140</sup>

When an electronic device sounded I was glad to hear a student complain that his meditation was disturbed and another student request a moment of silence. It was heartening to hear the verbiage we had studied during the project being used in conversation. In the British publication *Don’t Just Do Something Sit There: Developing Children’s Spiritual Awareness*, Mary K Stone gives a practical method for learning the skills of being physically and mentally still. One of the aims of the book is to encourage quiet reflection during a lesson.

Since our lesson integrated study on Israeli Independence Day, I asked the class what words they would put into a song about Israel. Answers included: small, wide, dry, inspirational, holy, water, strong independence and defendable.

We transitioned into movement by moving to the open space in front of the Jewish Yoga Hebrew alphabet. I asked which letter would be a good letter for the class to imitate. The Hebrew letter vav was called out. It just requires that the students stand straight. I explained that the meaning of the letter is also a connecting word meaning

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<sup>140</sup> Ronit Sorek and Sharon Weiser-Ferguson, *The Divine Image: Depicting God in Jewish and Israeli Art* (Jerusalem, Israel: The Israel Museum, 2006), 10.

“and”. Also, as the students posed for the camera in their positions I asked them to think of the word “and” adding and what will the future be?

Melvin responded by imitating the football player named Tim Tebow who prays on the field. Melvin called for the class to join him in a “Tebow” pose. Darren was the only student who did not feel comfortable doing that particular pose. Other Hebrew letter poses were imitated as we documented the class in these poses by taking photographs.

A questionnaire entitled **Questions to Ask Jewish Students** was handed out. The question regarding how they would describe God was answered as follows. God is creator, so mysterious that no words can describe him, a boss, someone you can always talk to, watches over everyone and is a creator of all. Anthony, Brian, and Patrick did not ascribe a gender to God. Darren and Melvin referred to God by using the male pronoun of ‘he’.

In describing God, Brian wrote the Hebrew word HaShem which means ‘The Name’ in English. This is a way of saying that God is nameless and can only be referred to simply by the name one would use to describe God if it was possible to give a name to God. Referenced earlier from *The Divine Image*, Halbertal quotes Maimonides who says that we can only eliminate that which God is not. “[A]ll that language really enables us to do is to say what God is not.”<sup>141</sup>

Answers to what they thought about God included: awesome boss in charge, father of all, helper to the poor, a ruler, perfect and the creator of every one. When asked if God cares they said that God cares because they were born, they resemble God, and that God gave them a home and food. Brian added that God cares for others but that God

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<sup>141</sup> Sorek and Weiser-Ferguson, *The Divine Image in Art*, 10.

does not care for him. Certainly Brian's answer is an indication of emotional challenges that he has battled in the seven or eight years that I had known him. His family was aware of this.

Regarding the question whether they thought that God listens to them, David, Darren and Melvin agreed that God listens. David wrote that God listens because he prays to God. For this question all the answers referring to God used the pronoun 'he'. Darren writes that God probably listens to him because God freed the slaves in Egypt. Melvin also agrees based on the rationale that we pray to God and therefore God listens to the prayer.

Anthony and Patrick disagreed. Anthony does not think it is possible that God could listen to every single person. Patrick sees the situation as a matter of privacy. God should not listen in on a personal conversation. Brian did not respond.

Although the questions had been answered already with prayer in mind, the next question on the questionnaire specifically asks if God hears their prayers. All responses are now in the affirmative or in some realm of possibility. Anthony now equates prayer with the possibility of asking God for forgiveness and therefore Anthony answers yes to the question. Patrick also changes his mind. For him prayer means that the conversation is meant for God. If you pray to God, then God listens. Brian now says that God could hear his prayers due to the concept of a miracle making it possible.

Regarding the question as to whether they felt connected to God through dreams Anthony, Brian, Darren, David and Melvin said no. Patrick was the only one who said yes because he believes that it is God who gives people dreams. Anthony said no because he doesn't dream about God. Brian also said he doesn't feel God in his dreams. Darren

seemed to harbor a doubt saying that he didn't dream about God but he did dream about God's creations. David said his dreams have nothing to do with God. Melvin said no although he couldn't remember his dreams.

Only Anthony definitively said animals help connect to God giving the reason that God created them. Brian simply said that he loves animals without answering whether or not they help him connect to God. David, Darren, Melvin and Patrick did not feel that animals helped them to feel connected to God. All wrote that they couldn't explain why.

The majority of students felt that nature helps them feel connected to God. Melvin was the only definitive no without an explanation. Anthony said yes because it was created by God. Brian said that nature helps him feel connected to God. Darren wrote maybe. David said yes because there is nothing man made there. Patrick said yes without an explanation.

The next question asked if the students were comfortable with silence. Three students said yes. Two said no. One student did not respond. Anthony said yes because it is relaxing for him. Brian did not respond. Darren said yes but it depends as to the length of the silence. David also said yes because he can relax. Melvin said that the silence disturbs him. Patrick was also not comfortable because he had the urge to laugh.

After the questionnaire, four of the students wanted to participate in the tug of war again. Two did not. I invited Melvin, who wanted to participate in the tug of war, to think of this physical experience on a deeper level. Since Melvin had opened up about how hard it was for him to focus in his public school studies, I suggested that Melvin use the tug of war as a way to reprogram himself for focusing. Therefore, when it would come



time for Melvin to have to do his homework, he could counter his resistance by thinking back to the struggle in the tug of war game. He could then visualize the struggle that he goes through when he has to study. I wanted to give a practical application to what some of the students anticipated as a fun activity.

Since two students did not want to participate in the physical tug of war, they were given the responsibility of answering questions for their respective teams. In order for the teams to participate in the tug of war, the answer men had to come up with the correct answers to the questions which I posed to them.

After the kids engaged in a few tug of wars downstairs, we went back to the classrooms upstairs and prepared to end our time together working on this Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children project by ending with blessings. When students asked for chocolate, which was my habit to bring for them, I offered to exchange chocolate for a blessing.

As students received chocolates they offered the following: never give up hope being like the little train that says, 'I think I can, I think I can.', be strong clarifying that the strength is emotional, be nice, be smart and intelligent, and always do the right thing. When Darren couldn't think of a blessing Melvin offered one on his behalf saying, 'be strong.' Then I offered the priestly blessing. When the teachers said amen I explained that the root word of amen is from the Hebrew word emunah for faith. I reminded Melvin that in the midst of the tug of war Melvin had faith in him self. The goal was to participate whether or not he won and to have the courage to lose. Winning is easy to accept. Being able to deal with loss shows even more strength. As I conclude the conclusion that

particular message had personal significance to me. May you go from strength to strength.

## **Chapter 4**

### **CONCLUSION**

In our many houses of worship we have congregations where we pray and schools where we teach the children. Our prayers are directed towards God. Our schools tend to focus upon the children. Parents of faith want to educate their children about their faith. Yet eventually the two parallel modes of existence within God's many houses must intersect at some point. The children become the next generation in our respective houses of faith. Yet if the children are not motivated to come back or to participate in a meaningfully relevant way the future is at stake.

Religious instruction for Jewish children can benefit from the implementation of a formal field of study known as Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. Integration of Spiritual Direction has already been introduced formally in its nascent stage. Like a newborn baby Jewish spiritual seekers have benefited from the field of study known as Jewish Spiritual Direction.

The logical next step is to introduce Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. Although Spiritual Direction for Christian Children may be limited, it does exist. Educating and studying children is an important advance in Spiritual Direction for Christian Children due to the fact that formal study of Spiritual Direction for Christians has existed longer. The Christian books focusing on spiritual development are prolific. Some of the Christian Spiritual Direction books for both adults and children are listed in the bibliography. None exist in this formal category of Spiritual Direction for Jewish

Children. This is related to the fact that the formal study of Jewish Spiritual Direction is so new. This paper has therefore documented a project of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. It is a natural progression for the field of Jewish Spiritual Direction.

Since the formal field of Jewish Spiritual Direction was implemented first at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in the late 1990's, as documented in the article entitled "Training Rabbis: Jewish Spiritual Direction" by Jacob Staub, less than twenty years ago, with only two Jewish books written formally on Jewish Spiritual Direction (*Jewish Spiritual Direction: An Innovative Guide from Traditional and Contemporary Sources* edited by Rabbi Howard Avruhm Addison and Barbara Eve Breitman and *Seeking and Soaring: Jewish Approaches to Spiritual Direction* edited by Rabbi Goldie Milgram), a formal body of study on implementation of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children has not yet evolved.

Therefore the methods used and information gleaned brought about interesting independent results. Our main findings were that students had different learning styles. Some were verbal. Some were non-verbal. The non-verbal students offered our teaching team a particular challenge. The focus became: How can we reach the non-verbal students? How could we get these kids to participate in a meaningful way?

My original method of teaching was going to be reading specific children's books that had a Spiritual Direction message. As class by class progressed the teachers and I realized that the activities which utilized the body and spirit engaged the students more than those focused on the mind.

The silence of the nonverbal students communicated beyond the conversation of the verbal students. My goal had been to teach the power of silence within an intellectual

lesson explaining why silence is part of spiritual direction. The nonverbal students were already using silence to communicate. They taught us a lesson which transcended words. All the planning and good hearted teaching goals were not going to change how the nonverbal students connected.

We might have concluded that the nonverbal students were just choosing not to participate. However, the passion for participation with music showed that these students connected beyond words. The playing of the drums, the rainsticks, and eventually the shofarim (plural Hebrew form of shofar) became their text. These nonverbal students would speak up to let us know that playing music was a subject worth engaging in conversation.

Sometimes just creating a space where students could participate with music, relax in 'God's living room' and listen to a spoken lesson sometimes became a more inviting atmosphere for dialogue. There wasn't pressure to have to sit and say words. Playing music showed that the students could be part of community without having to think about the correct answers to questions that were raised, or feel on guard that the teacher would be calling upon them for an answer.

While we as teachers thought that music was just a way to help the students feel comfortable, we didn't realize the scope of the ten lessons and the huge impact it would have. What had seemed peripheral was actually an important central aspect of the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore congregation. After the lessons had ended most of the students chanted their haftarahs and gave their speeches that are standard for becoming a bar mitzvah. Then there was graduation. Usually we don't see the students on a regular basis, if ever at all after 'the bar mitvah.'

This year the nonverbal students, in addition to a verbal student, volunteered to be trained in the summer by our ritual chair. They learned the proper notes on the shofar as understudies for the most public day of the congregation all year, Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. My ritual chair was looking to form a trained group of shofar blowers so that he would not have to rely on only one person or find himself scrambling to reach that lone shofar blower every year.

One of the nonverbal student's parents did not follow through in bringing him to the shofar blowing rehearsals. The other two students' parents did support their sons in this endeavor. When our regular shofar blower did not show up for such an important responsibility this past Rosh Hashanah, we had two trained and enthusiastic students whose role of understudies transformed into 'the shofar blowers.'

Through a miscommunication one of the students did not stay until the end of the service. The lone nonverbal student stepped up to the challenge and the whole honor and burden fell on his shoulders. He was able to help blow the necessary one hundred blasts of the shofar for a congregation of at least four hundred people. Since David had become a bar mitzvah, he was of the right age to blow the shofar for the benefit of the congregation. In the end it was David whose music participation became a real asset. This was applied Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children in practice. The students and teachers had learned from one another how to apply the lessons for real life use.

Movement had also been a way to get all the students to participate. This was another way that the students learned the Hebrew letters when they practiced Alef Bet Yoga. Telling the class which letters they wanted to do was also a way to get the nonverbal students talking. They wanted to participate in movement and knew they could

control which letters we moved to by calling out the appropriate Hebrew letter. It was essential to keep the attention of the boys with movement. As teachers we also felt the relief to be able to get up from sitting and move around. It just seems like a logical plan for balancing body, mind and soul. We are souls in bodies and taking care of the body is essential for balance.

We can certainly see how a project which intended to figure out how to teach Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children of bar mitzvah age transformed into the opportunity for learning how to teach Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. Another aspect of the community which could incorporate the role of food in learning, spiritual direction and community development includes Shabbat dinners and Passover seders. Both of these incorporate that overlooked potential fourth theme that had been integrated into the spiritual direction lessons; the role of food. The students had written about food constantly in their journals and responded favorably with the chocolate handed out to them in class.

A ritual that gets overlooked for its potential meaning is the throwing of candy at the bar or bat mitzvah. It merits its own mention in our bar and bat mitzvah handbook in the religious school at the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore. The throwing of the candy is something that the whole congregation looks forward to. The children in particular wait in anticipation to be able to throw the candy when the bar or bat mitzvah student finishes chanting his or her haftarah. The relieved student flashes an instant smile waiting for the candy to be thrown. It signifies affirmation of the months of intense preparation and symbolizes the many years of Jewish education that led up to this momentous occasion.

On a deeper level, food and feeding the hungry could be understood as more meaningful by integrating this as a valid theme in class. We all get hungry at some point. There is the individual reality and the significance for the community at large. It could be talked about, studied and contemplated. A nonverbal student could experience being fed and how to feed. Some hunger for food just as some hunger for spirituality. They can exist together. Jewish Spiritual Direction is part of our tradition if we just look for it and name it as such. We have challahs, wine, and matzahs for the appropriate Jewish holidays. These all have ritual significance and hold promise for future thought about including them in teaching Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children.

These insights were in complete contradiction to my original method of reading and listening to children's books. Since the essence of Spiritual Direction is holy listening I had thought that books would provide the perfect context for Spiritual Direction for Children. As a children's librarian who felt spiritually touched by the messages of children's books, my biggest surprise was in seeing that the books were not the most important catalyst to providing Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children.

From mistakes one can also glean information. My motivation had been an adult one regarding books for children. It is this adult child interplay that I believe is crucial to a more universal learning regarding Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children. As an adult I responded to the universal messages found in children's books. Unless the scope of the research is only going to be by children for children, the implicit participant in Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children is the adult.

Just as Rabbi Zalman Schacter Shalomi's widely received book *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: a Profound New Vision of Growing Older* changed the way society viewed



ageing and older people in society, I believe the implications for further implementation and research of Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children can change the value of the spiritual contributions that children can make.

Age is part of a spectrum. Children are only children for a limited time. In the stages of life a person keeps their identity even though they change in appearance into their bigger and more mature bodies. Yet in that time period in which their bodies are smaller and their experience is lesser children have a unique vantage point. They have a unique wisdom with their time on earth just as older people can teach what they have learned to the next generation.

From the first cry of a baby the baby is communicating verbally. There is a wisdom communicated from that moment that is inherently part of the experience of every human being. The spiritual wisdom of children can be studied formally and can enhance not only the lives of children but possibly even more so the lives of adults as well who by nature were once children and contain the memory of their experience as children throughout their lives. The wisdom of children may be termed simple yet sometimes that is what is needed to feel grounded and connected to God with a stress free purpose.

I believe an example of engaging a different perspective on how we think about youth and ageing is typified in the movie the *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. The main character of Benjamin Button, played by Brad Pitt, who is born as an ‘old man’ baby possessing the unique trait of growing younger can teach us something new about our perceptions of wisdom and youth and age, no matter what the age. In growing younger Benjamin Button also becomes wiser although he eventually suffers a loss of

memory in the physical appearance of a new born baby like an older person with dementia could.

These unique places of our human identity in birth and in death are reference points. At the opposite ends of the spectrum is a potentially shared emphasis on wisdom beyond words. My hope is that this paper will call upon us to challenge our notions of who can teach who, who is wise and the need for further research in studying the spiritual gifts of Jewish children. The implications can span beyond religion, faith and age.

A question for further study may be if wisdom is lost through the emphasis upon words and language to the exclusion of the more primal ways of knowing. Another related field of study would be regarding the wisdom of all life. That would include animals, plants and dimensions that we cannot document through facts and figures. To believe in God for Jews is to believe in a being which cannot be described or proven. Although we can believe that God speaks through the language of human words there is another language yet to be experienced. Faith is in the realm of spirit and belief. And there is value in that too.

In respect to the focus group studied of the b'nai mitzvah class there is an important conclusion related to the bar or bat mitzvah. This is the same bar or bat mitzvah life cycle event, held in synagogues across the planet, which motivates many Jewish families to support synagogues for the express goal of giving their children a wonderful party celebrating their proud Jewish identity.

Within non-Orthodox Jewish settings the connection to God may be getting lost. Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children specifically can enhance the Jewish education of a student preparing for his or her bar or bat mitzvah. While the haftarah portion chanted by

the bar or bat mitzvah student primarily emphasizes mastering a language which the child is most likely unfamiliar with, it places an extraordinary amount of stress upon gaining mastery over the Hebrew language. Within the Jewish prayers is also an integration of the Aramaic language.

For most adults this feat is a daunting one. To make the standard of success mastery of the verbal languages is to miss an opportunity for seeing the value of the nonverbal tools necessary for supporting a spiritual connection of the child to his or her religious community. Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children can be a possible prescription to the illness of a Jew's sickness with Judaism due to his or her Jewish education. We want Jews to be wedded to Judaism not divorced from it. Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children invites Jewish children to engage in the conversation with themselves, their community and with God. That is enough reason for us to put the necessary efforts into developing this field of study.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Spirituality Survey For Jewish Students**

What can you tell me about your Hebrew name?

How do you describe God?

What do you think about God?

Does God care about you?

Do you think God listens to you?

Does God hear your prayers?

Do you feel connected to God through dreams?

Do animals help you feel connected to God?

Does nature help you feel connected to God?

Are you comfortable with silence?

## Appendix B

### Methodological Bibliography: Resource Material for Teaching Ideas that Require Modification in Application to Hashpa'ah/ Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children

(These materials would be used for instructors as resource material in creating a curriculum)

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## Appendix C

### Spiritual Direction Booklist for Jewish Children: Bibliography of Resource Material to

#### Read to Jewish Children in Hashpa'ah/ Spiritual Direction

(These would be materials which could be read to children and used for purposes of generating a talking point or a focal point for Jewish children to express themselves)

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Bergren, Lisa Tawn. *How Big is God?* NY: Harper Blessings, HarperCollins Publishers, 2008.

Blood, Peter, and Annie Patterson, eds. *Rise up Singing: The Group Singing Songbook*. Bethlehem, PA: Sing Out Publications, 1992.

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- Deverell, Richard and Christine. *Daniel in the Lion's Den: My Best Bible Stories*. Linden, NJ: Grandreams, Inc., 2002.
- Erickson, Leni. *How Do You Know You Have a Soul?* U.S.A: Leni Erickson, 2010.
- Feinstein, Edward. *Tough Questions Jews Ask*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011.
- Garth, Maureen. *Starbright: Meditations for Children*. NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.

- Gates of Wonder: A Prayerbook for Very Young Children.* Texts by Robert Orkand, Joyce Orkand and Howard I. Bogot. Illustrated and Designed by Neil Waldman. Chair, Committee on Children's Liturgy, Kenneth D. Roseman. NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1991.
- Gellman, Rabbi Marc and Monsignor Thomas Hartman. *Where Does God Live? : Questions and Answers for Parents and Children.* NY: Ballantine Books, 1991.
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- Guber, Tara and Leah Kalish. *Yoga Pretzels: 40 Fun Yoga Activities for Kids & Grownups.* Cambridge, MA.: Barefoot Books, 2005.
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## Appendix D

### Ten Lesson Plan Transcriptions with Insights Gleaned from the Project

**Thursday February 2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson Plan Goal:** To teach Spiritual Direction for Jewish Children, using the spiritual tools of Jewish Meditation, Jewish Yoga, and Jewish Journaling, and integrate them into the students' spiritual practices.

**Multiple Methods:** Talk about Spiritual Direction, give out journals, write in journals, practice meditation and yoga, talk about Hebrew names, read a story and while discussing the book, talk about prayer, how to pray, what prayer means, and how to integrate prayer into everyday life.

**Multiple Exercises:** Encourage students to create their own prayer, write it in their journal and also write about what their Hebrew names means to them. Discuss what their bar mitzvah means to them and what it means to become a responsible adult. Invite students to write about what it means to be Jewish and a responsible Jewish adult.

**Procedure:** Introduce Hashpa'ah/ Spiritual Direction Hand out and have students answer “Questions to Ask Jewish Students” [Record the answers on sheets and put questions in Appendix] Give students their own journal. Discuss the word Shalom. Teach the Shalom Meditation and try together. From *Yoga Pretzels* by Tara Guber and Leah Kalish, read *Animal Friend* (this visualization was read from card). Talk about the practice of Yoga. Introduce the idea of Hebrew Yoga as Jewish Yoga. Have b’nai mitzvah students do the Alef Bet Yoga Poses using the glossary of Alef-Bet Yoga Poses found in book *Alef-Bet Yoga for Kids* by Ruth Goldeen. Review three of the poses Alef, Bet and

Gimmel in *Aleph-Bet Yoga: Embodying the Hebrew Letters for Physical and Spiritual Well-Being* by Steven A. Rapp.

From *Yoga Pretzels*, do “River” reading card. Have b’nai mitzvah class each read a card from *Yoga Pretzels* for the class to do. Regarding Hebrew names, discuss each boy's Hebrew name. Since David is our next bar mitzvah and since we talked about Hebrew names we will read a story about David’s Hebrew name Daniel called *Daniel in the Lion's Den* by Richard and Christine Deverell. After we read book we can ask questions and receive answers about the book. Questions with some answers for reference follow.

Do you think that is a good prayer to first be thankful and then ask for something that you need or want? How does the King feel when Daniel is brought before the king? Answer: Sad, he wishes he never made the law. When Daniel is brought to the den of lions what does the king wish for Daniel? God rescue Daniel.

As soon as it is light, what does King Darius do? Answer: He runs to the lion's den, calls out Daniel's name and asks if God rescued Daniel from the lions. What does Daniel reply? “As I have done nothing wrong, my God sent his angel and he shut the lions' mouths.” What do you think about angels? Are angels a Jewish concept?

Read *Does God Hear My Prayer?* by August Gold. Read Psalm 1, Psalm 4, Psalm 5, and Psalm 8 of *Psalms for Young Children* by Marie-Helene Delval. The students received the following instructions from me, “You can choose any of the following options for the journal: Create your own prayer and write it in your journal. Write about whatever you want to write about. Draw a picture of what prayer means to you. Draw a picture of anything you want to draw about. Write about what your Hebrew name means to you. What did or does becoming a bar mitzvah mean to you? What does it mean to

become a responsible adult? Write about what it means to be Jewish. How does one become a responsible Jewish adult? Write something about yourself that you want others to know about you.”

**Results from class on Thursday February 2, 2012:** Anthony, Brian, Darren, David, Norman, Patrick, Teachers Tiqveh and Koro Terroade, and I, (Rabbi Leslie Schotz) were present. I explained to the class that I would co-teach the b’nai mitzvah class with Teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade for ten sessions of classes. I handed out: *Questions to Ask Jewish Students*. This is a sheet which would be filled out a number of times to see if there is a difference in responses. I asked the class what they thought Spiritual Direction is. Brian answered, “Guidance. Be told to do something. Following as leader or participant in something. Following your own direction.”

Each student was given his own journal. I had some concerns in giving out journals to the class of boys, wondering if the boys would think this was a “girl” thing. The boys loved the journals right away, wrote their names inside and had no reservations using it. One teacher shared with me that Anthony had said that he thought that only celebrities write in journals.

As the boys were writing in their journals, I sang a meditative chant called Shalom. Then I invited the students to dissect the word Shalom into two parts: the Shaaaa, as the first syllable and lowwwwm, as the second. I varied the divisions in the syllables alternatively as Shal, as the first syllable and OOOOOOMMMMMM, as the second. Also, I pointed out the vowel emphasis of the first syllable is AH and that the second vowel focus is on the OH sound found in OM. This meditative technique of OM has been become familiar in popular culture.

When I asked the students to describe the word shalom, Brian said it means hello, goodbye or welcome. Then I asked for any other meanings, asking the following questions: “What if I said the Middle East? What do you want to see happen in the Middle East? ” Brian answered Peace. Norman mentioned Iran and the link between Iran and Israel. Brian said that Iran had gotten hold of a nuclear weapon and Israel will bomb Iran. I asked the students how they felt talking about the Middle East. Students answered: anger, worry, concern. I asked the students if they felt at peace. They said no.

I asked the students what they do to feel better when there are upsetting things happening in the world, so that they can feel at peace. That is when I introduced to the students the idea of Jewish Meditation. I explained that all present would try repeating the word Shalom and then have silence for as long as we could. The students were invited to close their eyes. After finishing the repetitive chant of the word Shalom, the students were encouraged to focus in on their breath as they were transitioning to silence. Sighs could be heard as students concentrated on breathing. It was good that the students were using the breathing exercise as a release bringing them closer to relaxation. There are meditation techniques which encourages the meditator to make sounds as the breath is released.

After a few seconds, some of the boys started giggling. Due to the nature of this class which is usually silent and serious, I took this to be a good sign. The students didn’t laugh too often. I asked the students how they felt about the silence. To my surprise, most of the students said they liked silence. I explained that sometimes, when people are uncomfortable with silence, they laugh a nervous laugh. I said that the silence is there to help bring peace adding, “If you feel comfortable with silence that is a good sign. You

have peace going on in your body; in your world.”

Norman remarked that there was laughing going on during the silence. I explained that it was a good thing to have people happy because sometimes people cry in the silence, and that's ok too. Then I said that I wanted to talk about yoga and asked the students if they had ever heard of yoga. Brian said “You bend your legs all the way up to your nose.” Norman said, “It is uncomfortable stretches that women do.” I explained that my goal is not to do uncomfortable stretches. Norman then said, “Wait, what does this have to do with meditation?” I explained that first we were doing meditation and then we would go into movement with yoga.

Explaining that this is yoga specifically geared for kids, I showed the students the *Yoga Pretzels* kid friendly laminated yoga instruction cards. Then I took one of the cards entitled Animal Friend. It was a visualization card which I read to them in the hopes of taking the focus away from “uncomfortable stretches that women do” and make the context about something they could relate to. Once again the students laughed. Yet it helped us transition to talking about animals and pets specifically. This was a great ice breaker. Every student had a pet. Each pet has a name. Every student had a chance to share their pet's name and the connection they have to their pet or pets.

Teacher Koro Terroade has tropical fish. Darren's pets are: the bird is Cassie; the fish is Fishie; Scaredy is the turtle and the cats are Foxy, Zipper, Princess, and Getco. Brian's cat is Midnight. David has a dog named Violet. David, who doesn't talk much, took time to explain that there are stray cats in the neighborhood that his family feeds. Patrick's dog is Miles. Norman's dog is Barry. He is a beagle and he can sniff out bed bugs. When I asked if thinking about their pets made them happy, they answered yes, as

long as the pet was in good health. There was a cacophony of voices in the classroom discussing when their pets were hurt. This was a buzz of conversation like I had never heard before.

Then I introduced the book called *Alef Bet Yoga for Kids*. One student asked if it was going to hurt. We then moved to a larger space for doing the Alef Bet Yoga. I explained that she had once worked as a certified health spa instructor and encouraged everyone to move at their own pace without straining their bodies. A large size poster was displayed to the class as I read the book which was a replica of the poster. I used both the poster and book to demonstrate the poses to the class, as we did the poses together. I stressed throughout that if a pose was uncomfortable, then don't do it and only do that which was comfortable to do.

At this point I wanted students to be mindful of their Hebrew names. They knew that David was the next bar mitzvah and that his Hebrew name was Daniel, so we read the story about the figure Daniel in the lion's den. Students were encouraged to ask questions of the story that I was reading.

Before I began reading, Brian gave a summary of the story as he had heard it before. Brian explained that Daniel is thrown into the lion's den, but Hashem protected him. "The lions didn't harm him. He was like praying or something like that." Norman stopped me to ask how the men in the story knew to report Daniel to King Darius. He said, "How would they know that Daniel is praying?" Norman asked again how the men would know if Daniel is praying to God or not. Brian answered "because they heard him." Norman asked again if the men would just think that Daniel is praying to the king. I explained that, in the language of the prayer, the king wants to hear his name "King

Darius” and that Daniel is addressing God instead.

Norman asked if the angels shutting the lions' mouths constituted animal abuse. Norman was concerned that if the lions' mouths were shut, they couldn't breathe. I explained that they could probably breathe out of their noses. When the story was finished, I reviewed the details of the story in order to test the students' listening skills. The story became a focal point as to what is said in prayer. Questions were raised as to how a king could make a rule to pray to him and how is it that Daniel would choose to know this type of person since Daniel is monotheistic.

Next, I read *Does God Hear My Prayer?* Then I discussed what the Psalms are. There was some confusion as to “songs” and “psalms” since psalms was not a familiar word to everyone. Brian knew of Sabbath Psalms since he has heard the name in shul. I read four psalms from *Psalms for Young Children*. The students were then challenged to write their own prayer. I also gave out alternative ideas for the students' journals. They had the freedom to write about whatever they wanted to write about. Another option was to draw something.

Norman shocked everyone by saying that he wanted to draw someone getting hit by a car. I explained that Norman had the freedom to write or draw whatever he wanted to because it was his journal. I said, “Your journal should be a place that you should feel comfortable saying and drawing whatever you want to.” Although I made a mental note of the nature of Norman's comment, I wanted Norman to know that he is a reflection of God and whatever he does is part of God. I said to the class that the only time you are going to be judged is by God, unless you break the law in this country. Then you will have to go before a human judge.

On the topic of contemplating adult decisions, I asked, “What does becoming a bar mitzvah mean to you?” Anthony said “responsibility”. The rabbi asked, “What does it mean to be a responsible adult?” A student replied, “You have to do stuff”. Anthony said you have to get a job and make money and pay bills. I asked, “What does it mean to be Jewish?” Norman said “discrimination.” Then I asked, “Why would people then convert to Judaism?” Norman said, “People actually do that?” I asked, “Why would someone convert to Judaism, if that person is then going to be discriminated against?” A student said “because you (referring to the theoretical convert) are tough.”

Norman then happened to look closely at the journals that I had handed out. I had specifically researched journals for teenagers that would be good for boys. One of the drawings in the multicultural journal was of a boy looking at a pocket knife in the window. Norman made a comment about how someone would save all his money to buy the pocket knife in the window. As we were laughing at the strangeness of the depiction in this journal meant for teenagers, it was remarked that it must be a tough neighborhood. I then shared that I felt scared when I was in public school. I felt discriminated against and felt unsafe. Norman asked me if people made fun of me because I was a Jew. I explained that the kids in the neighborhood would be physically violent and threaten violence on an ongoing basis. Students said that today they would be sent to jail. I agreed.

Then Brian shared deeply about how kids in his school were prejudiced against him and that it affected him so deeply that he had to go to a mental hospital for three days. We were shocked to hear Brian’s public admission. Some students didn’t know how to react. While Norman was making light of the situation, Anthony explained that this was serious. At this point, I took the opportunity to fill in a student latecomer on what he had



missed in the beginning of the class. I explained for the sake of Patrick and restated for the class that I was studying Spiritual Direction. I explained that as a Spiritual Director, I could theoretically meet with someone like Brian privately. I was surprised at the direction that the class had taken and felt that we had entered another level of Spiritual Direction, which is Group Spiritual Direction. I explained that what had just happened with Brian was something that could happen in Group Spiritual Direction. One person would share and the group was there to support that person.

I explained that what was just shared was deep and heavy and not everyone could deal with it. Everyone was invited to think of a word of support to say to Brian. Norman said, “This sucks for you”. Brian was laughing. I said that it was a positive sign that Brian was smiling. Norman explained that he was joking. I pointed out that maybe Brian needed to hear a joke because he was now smiling. I proposed that Norman had shown support and that it was important to show respect to one another. When I asked Brian if Norman’s remark was helpful, he said that in fact it did not help him at all.

Then I challenged the group to say something which would in fact support Brian. Anthony said “Brian, you're awesome.” I asked Brian if he believed it. He responded only a little bit and added that he is only awesome at video games. I then encouraged Brian to really think about and take in that he is awesome. Also, the group was invited to help Brian feel that he is awesome and supported and that we are a team.

Norman said “even though he's a Jew”. Anthony responded to the tone of Norman’s voice saying, “What? We're all Jews!” I explained that there are times to kid and sometimes there are times to be a little more serious. The class took a break and I offered the option to the class to write in their journals. Anthony responded with “Yes!” The

journals were collected after class.

Each student had written in one page of his journal. Anthony drew a picture of a book of prayers with a dancing banana on top and a muffin underneath. Brian chose a biblical theme drawing a gigantic snake with a bubble saying “Eat the fruit”. He also wrote “In the bible the snake desieved the 2 people in the garden of Eden. The other students drew pictures.

In evaluating the results from the class above held on **Thursday February 2, 2012** is the following, regarding the goal of the teaching of the spiritual tool of Jewish Meditation, are the following passages from *Gifts of Abraham* by Audi Gozlan: “Interestingly, the Lubavitcher Rebbe – (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson) – supported and encouraged the teaching of Jewish meditation as early as the 1970’s. This support was in part a response to the rising number of Jews who had begun to explore Eastern meditations.”<sup>142</sup>

“Judaism, a religion whose relationship with G-d is based on the teachings of the Torah, offers a very intense approach to meditation...The focus of Jewish meditation...is G-d. In Judaism, we meditate in order to tap into our G-dly soul...Like its Eastern counterparts, Jewish meditation seeks to liberate us from our physical, mental and spiritual limitations to a point where our negative emotions are in check and we are empowered to find the purpose of our daily physical existence.”<sup>143</sup>

Regarding a clarification of the goal of Jewish Yoga emanating from a Jewish connection to Yoga is the following from *Gifts of Abraham*, “Yoga can find its place in

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<sup>142</sup> Audi Gozlan. *Gifts of Abraham: the Untold Story of Brahman: Unity and Peace through Meditation* (Montreal: Oslo Books, 2002), 4.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

Judaism as a discipline for both a healthier mind and body, provided that its religious practices involving deities is avoided...Yoga philosophy teaches that every person has a soul- (Atman)- which, like in Judaism, is an expression of Divinity. Furthermore, Divinity expresses itself within the world as 'Brahman'.”<sup>144</sup>

“The word Yoga, when spelled in Hebrew, can also be pronounced as 'yegia'. Yegia means to strive and to reach – ultimately to bond to and unite with the substance one is reaching for. As with the Mitzvot, the eight Yoga Aphorisms seek to connect the body and the soul with the universe....In Psalms 128:2, King David writes: 'If you strive (Yegia) physically...then you will be praiseworthy and you will prosper.'...Thus, in Judaism, 'Yegia' is a means of transforming and subjugating the body and the material world only until both become proper receptacles for G-dliness. Physical activities such as the performance of the Mitzvot – (Divine commandments) – allows for discovering G-d in natural settings, rather than in supernatural realms.”<sup>145</sup>

“Although the practice of Yoga is similar in certain ways to Judaism, its foundations are not based on monotheistic principles. Indeed, the cornerstone of Yoga and most other Hindu religions is the belief in various deities as expressions of the Divine...In accordance with these beliefs, 'Atman'...is an expression of these deities....Meanwhile, Judaism teaches that the only true freedom one can experience results from tapping into one's soul and connecting with none other than G-d, the one and only Creator of the Universe.”<sup>146</sup>

**Thursday February 9<sup>th</sup> Lesson Plan Goal:** Review Spiritual Direction, expand

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 81.

upon its definition and why I am working with the b'nai mitzvah class. Introduce the concept of tikkun olam with Black History Month in mind, integrate the spiritual tool of listening to another's truth in the world as an aspect of Spiritual Direction in pairs or as a group, introduce the idea of music being linked to spirituality and get ready for the Jewish holiday of Purim.

**Multiple Methods:** Discuss topics including: our purpose on earth, seeking peace and honoring the rainbow of faiths and peoples. Build upon and practice spiritual tools of Jewish Meditation, Jewish Yoga, and Jewish Journaling in conjunction with prayer and music.

**Multiple Exercises:** Hand out journals. Instruct students to write in their journals about their purpose on earth and how they can make the world a better place. Hand out instruments for students to express themselves musically in the context of a Jewish spiritual environment.

**Procedure:** Introduce the idea of various forms of Spiritual Direction and respecting other traditions and people. Sing Shalom Meditation and practice again together. Read *Gathering Sparks* by Howard Schwartz. Pair up and discuss what doing good deeds in the world are.

Regroup, discuss answers, and then discuss book. Questions for discussion are: How do you think that good deeds help repair the world? What do you think the book means by sparks of light? Can kindness create sparks of light? Can love create sparks of light? Who was Rabbi Isaac Luria? What does tikkun olam mean? What did the myth of shattering of the vessels explain? Regarding the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, explain how the Jews of Spain could gather the sparks for the purpose of doing

good deeds in the world. Instead of seeing exile as punishment, it was an opportunity to create beauty in the world. Pair up and discuss tikkun olam with a partner.

Introduce the idea of various forms of Spiritual Direction and what it means to respect other traditions and people. Read *Martin's Big Words: the Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr* by Doreen Rappaport. Talk about book using the following questions (and optional answer): How do you think Martin's faith influenced him to stand up for injustice in the world? Why did Martin win the Nobel Peace Prize? "He won it because he taught others to fight with words not fists." Dr King's birthday is celebrated as a National Holiday the third Monday in January, which is near to King's birthday of Jan 15.

Read "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" from *How Sweet the Sound: African-American Songs for Children* edited by Wade and Cheryl Hudson. Hand out instruments for class participation. Play and sing "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" from *Rise Up Singing* edited by Peter Blood and Annie Patterson. Then ask the following questions: How did you feel using instruments with the song? How does music make you feel in general? Do you think it is possible to use instruments to pray to God? What does spirituality mean to you? Can instruments help you feel spiritual or connected to the world or to God?

Practice Hebrew yoga. Have b'nai mitzvah students do the Alef Bet Yoga poses using the glossary of Alef-Bet Yoga Poses found in book *Alef-Bet Yoga for Kids* by Goldeen with the accompanying poster. Review three of the poses Alef, Bet and Gimmel in *Aleph-Bet Yoga* by Rapp. Read Psalm 9, Psalm 13, Psalm 18, and Psalm 23 of *Psalms for Young Children* by Delvel. Draw or write a prayer in your journal, or draw a picture of any of the spiritual tools that we have been learning about including meditation, yoga or music. Get ready for Purim.

**Results from class on Thursday February 9, 2012** David, Melvin, Norman, Patrick, Teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade, and I, (Rabbi Leslie Schotz) were in attendance. I welcomed Melvin, who had not been present to last week's session. Melvin was given his own journal and I asked him to fill his name in it, explaining that this would now be his journal. I explained to him why I was now teaching in the class. I asked the class if they remembered what my explanation was to them last week.

When I mentioned that I was a student now studying Spiritual Direction, Norman commented that he had never heard of such a class. I pointed out that he was correct that it is a relatively new field of study in school. Then Norman asked if I was going to a Jewish college. I explained that I was studying in two places. One is Jewish. The other is Christian.

Then I explained that Spiritual Direction was known by Chassidic Jews and asked if they knew what Chassidic Jews were. Norman asked, "Isn't that the Jews that dress up as Orthodox Jews in NYC?" I explained that there are Chassidic Jews today who wear the garb of 16<sup>th</sup> century Poland. Then I explained that they had retained Jewish mysticism in their lives, by integrating the idea of having a personal relationship with God, by talking to God. In Christianity, the term Spiritual Direction is very common.

For Jews, the idea is to try and return to the idea of Spiritual Direction. I said that I thought it made sense to talk about God in synagogue. Then I explained that it was important for me to work with the b'nai mitzvah class because I thought they offered a lot of wisdom and I told them that I had listened to the tapes of their time together in the previous week and had appreciated their responses. I said, "Each of us can learn from one another." I also encouraged those who don't talk too much, to talk more, saying that they

have good things to say as well. The class explained to Melvin what we did in the previous week.

When I reminded the class that we they had moved around and stretched, Norman said, “We were doing the alphabet.” I said that we had moved to imitate the Jewish alphabet creating Jewish Yoga. Norman asked if people actually do that daily. After telling Norman that he asked a good question, I explained that most people I knew did a more classic form of yoga, possibly integrating into it Jewish concepts. Then I explained that there is something called Otiyot Chayot in Hebrew, meaning Living Letters, and that a rabbinic colleague of mine had studied with the founder of a practice which moves to the Hebrew letters as a daily practice. [I was referring to my colleague Rabbi Reuben Modek, founder of Jewish Learning Circles in New York, who studied with Yehudit Goldfarb founder of Otiyot Chayot, also spelled as Otiyot Hayyot or Otiot Khayyot. This is an original movement form based on T'ai Chi and the shapes of the Hebrew Letters as created by Yehudit Goldfarb.]

Also, I explained that my understanding of yoga is that it is practicing another religious tradition and that I would like to practice a form of yoga that focuses upon a Judaism. Together the class and I reviewed that we had practiced Jewish Yoga, Jewish Meditation and writing in their journals. Then I introduced the concept of tikkun olam, explaining, “In Hebrew it means to repair...” as a student interrupted adding “the world”. I said that we were combining this lesson with a subject that is popular in our culture. I said, “The month of February is...” as a student added “Black History”.

Norman asked, “What is Black History month?” I explained that it is a month devoted to the unique experience of African Americans. Norman then asked why there

isn't a month devoted to White History. Melvin said, "Well, we were never slaves."

Norman said, "We have a history too." I asked, "What about the other eleven months of the year?" explaining that Black History can be confusing because different people look different ways. There can be Italian people darker in skin tone than certain African Americans. I explained that the terminology is confusing. We are not actually white. We are not the color of the white walls. We are all different shades.

Although it was distressing to hear the following remark, I realized how important it was that we were talking honestly about this subject. Norman said that he heard that black people had once been white people but somebody got the idea of slavery. Then Norman said that they had people work in a really hot climate and their skin got burnt. "We all have different theories," I explained and suggested that we approach this from another perspective. What about the idea that the first person who was discovered named Lucy came from the area of Africa? I explained that anthropology studies the different physical characteristics of people which they classify into different races. They are Caucasian, Negroid and I think Asiatic. These are good questions about race and skin color because we all got mixed up along the way.

Norman asked if black people had enslaved white people. I gave an explanation beyond the idea of black and white, explaining how different tribes fought, and in war times the victor enslaved the losing tribes or people. The other obvious answer is that Jews were slaves in Egypt. We know there were slaves in the bible. Slavery existed and it seems like a cruel thing for one people to enslave another people. A teacher pointed out that it still exists today. I explained that there is white slavery which refers to a number of things, but one of them is the slavery of women.



Norman asked, “It still goes on?” Unfortunately there are women who are snatched and taken. I pointed out the movie *Taken* starring Liam Neeson in which girls traveling alone in Europe are taken and sold into slavery. I explained that slavery happens all around the world. Then I pointed out there are children in India who are slaves making Indian rugs. Today we have children in slavery, women in slavery and all types of people in slavery.

“So here we are as free people in the world, but there are certain rules you have to follow from your parents, and then your parents have certain rules that they have to follow. What do you feel like your purpose is here on earth?” I asked. Patrick said, “to have a life”. I then asked what it means to have a life. I asked for clarification, “What would you say you look forward to in life?” David said, “I don't know”. I said to David, “Hopefully you will become clearer so that you will know.” David said, “It's hard”. Melvin said, “I want to get married and have children and be a paleontologist.” When I asked Melvin to explain what a paleontologist is he said, “A person who digs up extinct animals and stones and sells it to museums.” I said that it was interesting to unearth the past.

Norman said that he thought our purpose on earth was to have children so that the population doesn't die out. I then said that *tikkun olam* is about making the world a better place, asking the class, “What can you do to repair the world?” Melvin said that we can stop burning fossil fuels so that we can stop making holes in the atmosphere. I explained, “If we don't have a planet to live on, we aren't going to be able to live...” as Patrick interrupted and added, “To have a life,” since he felt compelled to add his thoughts as to what his purpose on earth is at that very moment.

Norman asked, “If people know that this is going to happen, that eventually all energy is going to die off, then why don't they do something about it?” I explained that I think some people are trying to do something, while other people are trying to ignore it. (By the way, shortly after this class session, Norman went on to compete in and win a first ever Essay Award, in his large public school, on this very subject of global warming!)

“Some people think just about themselves which is the opposite of tikkun olam, repairing the world,” I said, continuing, “Some people just don't care. They may just care about their next car or their next material object without regards for how it is going to affect other people. Hopefully the children being born are going to help us come up with the answers. It is amazing how far we have come from before you were born. In my mother's time there was no television set, and then it was created. Once there were no airplanes. We are always developing new things. Hopefully we are going to develop an answer to global warming.”

The class was then instructed to take out their journals, write about what their purpose on earth is and how they can make the world a better place. Norman asked if he could draw a picture and if the picture could be of how the earth is being destroyed. I was delighted to hear Norman ask this, since last week he asked if he could draw a picture of someone being run over by a car. Norman indicated that he was taking the subject matter much more seriously this week.

The transformation in Norman was evident. Norman drew the following words, above last week's drawing of someone with an angry expression, holding a cane, getting run over by two smiling faced people in a car: Good Deeds: Being nice, Being helpful,

Being responsible. On the next page of Norman's journal was a polar bear with tears streaming down its face, as a very large sun melted the spot upon which the polar bear was standing. On the next page is a dead person, possibly an effect of the world being destroyed by global warming.

Melvin asked, “What if you are not comfortable answering any of these questions?” I said that he didn’t have to answer the questions, but could instead write whatever he felt comfortable writing. I told Melvin that this was his journal which he could put into it whatever he wanted to put into it. Last week the students had communicated a sentiment similar to Melvin's question. This week the other students seemed more focused and comfortable writing. I believe that a transformation of sorts had occurred in just one week. In a way, Melvin was a test case. He had been absent and demonstrated a discomfort indicated by the other students only a week before.

When Melvin received the journal, he drew an armed forces depiction with pictures of rifles and a man asking: How about this one? After the directed lesson regarding tikkun olam, Melvin wrote: “plant a tree, doing your chores, listening to your parents, don't fight with your bro/sis, feed your pets, being nice, helpful, cleaning beaches, donated sadakah (Hebrew word for charity), help your nabors (neighbors).”

In David's journal, the tikkun olam message is not represented. His first picture is a very nice picture of a boy or man. The next page shows depictions of a rifle and a gun. Since he had been sitting next to Melvin, it seems that he was influenced by Melvin's initial drawings of the armed forces and guns. David is then paired with Norman for tikkun olam discussions, but there is no visual or written information regarding that part of the lesson.

In Patrick's journal, there is a change of expression in his journal as well. Last week, scribbled doodles and mazes. This week he wrote: “reduce, reuse, recycle, charity, organizations, giving.” Norman also displayed another sign of a transformation this week when instead of saying that yoga is uncomfortable stretches that women do, he asks, “Can we do the yoga?”

I reviewed the word Shalom saying that it means hello, goodbye and peace. Norman said “And my name.” I was perplexed but asked him to elaborate. Norman said that his Hebrew name Noach means, “A little bit. It means rest or comfort.” I was thrilled to see Norman once again engaged with the process. Norman was thinking about the meaning of his Hebrew name Noach, wanting to be included, instead of making a joke or a sarcastic remark, like last week. The Hebrew teachers and I then analyzed a few Hebrew words. I explained that Norman includes the word 'nach' which can be found in the word menucha, like Shabbat rest. Teacher Koro Terroade pointed out the word nacham means comfort. Now I understood where Norman's response had originated. Norman had been thinking of a Hebrew root word that sounded like his name. Nacham can mean comfort. Nach sounds like nacham.

The class then sang the Shalom meditation. I then explained that I would be reading a book called *Gathering Sparks* by Schwartz about Tikkun Olam, and asking questions about the book. The students were also told that they would be discussing this in pairs. I paired Norman and Melvin together. I also explained that after this segment that I would read another book. After reading that book, instruments would be handed out for class participation while I played the guitar. When I mentioned I would play the guitar, there were a few “wows”. Later, Teacher Koro Terroade said that he felt that I had bonded

more with the students by playing the guitar. He thought that this made me seem “more human”, maybe more accessible as a rabbi.

I introduced the book *Gathering Sparks* by Schwartz, mentioning that it was an Association of Jewish Libraries Award Winner. One of the students asked, “What is it about?” Before answering the question, I wanted to make sure that the students knew the author and illustrator of the book. A lot of effort is placed into writing and publishing a book. It is only appropriate that the students understand that proper citation is given.

After the book was read in full students were told to go into pairs and discuss a definition of ‘good deeds in the world’. Teachers Koro Terraode and Tiqvah Terroade listened to the pairs and guided them to discuss and process their thoughts on the subject matter at hand. They were given the option to bring their journals with them.

The tuning of guitar strings could be heard in the background. I gave the students space to talk as I prepared for the next segment. Melvin reported on his discussion with Norman about a definition of ‘good deeds in the world’. Melvin said they talked about planting a tree, listening to your parents, don't fight with your brother or sister, feeding your pets, being nice and helpful, cleaning, donating tzedakah (Hebrew word translated as charity) and helping neighbors.

David reported on his discussion with Patrick. He said: “charity, organizations, giving and sharing.” Then I asked: “How do you think the good deeds help repair the world?” When I asked if kindness could help in creating sparks of light, the students answered no. They thought that it literally wasn't possible. Then Melvin asked if what I asked about sparks of light was a metaphor.

Then someone else mentioned that it was a simile and the class digressed a little bit

about their opinions on proper semantics. I proceeded to ask questions about the book that was read earlier called *Gathering Sparks* by Schwartz. Melvin remembered that Isaac Luria lived in Israel. When I mentioned a Jewish expulsion in 1492, Norman asked about Columbus. The class talked about the possibility that there were Jews on Columbus' ships. Norman was amazed at this possibility. Teacher Koro Terroade mentioned the possibility that Columbus himself may have been Jewish. One of the students remarked that "it was so cool".

When I asked what tikkun olam means, Melvin replied "to repair the world." When I pointed out that the story posited that Jews were sent out in 1492 like sparks into the world, Norman asked if that was illegal immigration. Norman pointed out that there were restrictions about Jews coming into America.

I then proceeded to read a book about Martin Luther King, Jr called *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Rappaport. Norman asked if the reference to Whites Only was the same as the signs Blacks Only in this country. I said yes. Then I added that there had been signs that said: No Jews Allowed and No Irish Allowed. I then told the class that I had seen Martin Luther King Jr speak when my father graduated from Library School. I was little, and although I didn't remember the speech, my family had pictures taken of the family with Martin Luther King Jr in the distance at C.W. Post College/Long Island University located in Greenvale New York.

The graduation was probably within a year's time to the time Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated. While on Long Island, Martin Luther King, Jr had visited Bay Shore and went to the beach. Although it was a time before Teachers Koro and Tiqvah Korroade were born, they had a photograph of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr riding on a

bicycle in Ocean Beach in Bay Shore. It may have been the day that I had heard him speak, since the day had been a beautiful hot sunny day on Long Island.

The students were then told that they would get a break and would be able to play instruments after the break. Some students wanted to play the instruments right away which they were encouraged to if they chose to do so. The instruments included: two bongo drums, two small Native American hand drums, a rain stick and a shakere. I then introduced the spiritual “Sweet Low, Sweet Chariot” and read it from the book entitled *How Sweet the Sound: African-American Songs for Children* edited by Hudson.

Then I used the book *Rise Up Singing: The Group Singing Songbook* edited by Blood and Paterson to play the guitar chords to the spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”. The students joined in immediately with their instruments. It was exciting to hear the ruach (Hebrew word for spirit) in the room through the drumming. [When I played the tape back for transcription, it sounded like a serious African drumming event.]

We then moved over to another area to practice Hebrew yoga. The pictures of the Hebrew letters were displayed on a poster which accompanies the book *Alef-Bet Yoga for Kids* by Goldeen. Immediately Patrick called out for us to do the Hebrew letter “mem”. He knew the name of the letter and said it so that we could all engage in bending and stretching to form the letter. I was thrilled that Patrick, who tends to be very quiet, had not only taken the initiative to call out a Hebrew letter, but had also been specific about the Hebrew letter.

Students seemed to like the challenge of choosing difficult looking poses. In order to choose the pose, they had to know the name of the letter! This exercise was motivating them to recall Hebrew letters. As the students stretched and turned, I encouraged the

students and teachers to be careful about their backs as they moved. My experience as a certified health instructor guided me in teaching this experiential part of the class.

As I looked at the poster, I was able to guide the students and teachers on how to form the Hebrew 'mem' letter. There was laughing in a light hearted manner and photographs were taken of the class in action. As the class was forming the Hebrew letter mem, I said the sound of mem “Mmmmm”. The class repeated the sound. I then said “Shalom” concentrating on the final “mmmm”.

Norman asked if it is ok to stretch. I said it is good for the body to stretch. Someone chose the Hebrew letter vav. I pointed out, “We are spelling Shalom backwards.” The class then concentrated on the “Oooooohh” sound as in Shalom. Then I suggested that the class stretch their bodies to form the Hebrew letter lamed next. Then I said, “We are doing the shin. There was a “Yes!” response due to the idea of once again moving into an unusual position on the floor, in order to form the lamed.

After the class formed the letters that made up the word shalom by moving their bodies into movements that imitated the Hebrew letters, someone asked to “do” the letter “bet”. I made a joke, “You wanna bet?” There was laughing and I kidded that the class should collect jokes for a book of Jewish Yoga humor. I asked what kind of exercise the students do daily. Norman indicated no exercise. Melvin said sit – ups. Norman joked that he is fat. I explained that it's not a matter of being fat it's a matter of being healthy. Exercise is a part of keeping the body, the mind and the nerves in order.

“What happens when people get anxious?” I asked, continuing, “What do they forget to do? They forget to breathe.” So that's what I instructed the class to do now. There was some laughing. I said, “Think about breathing in through the nose, and out



through the mouth.” Then I suggested that the class add the arms. As the class took a breath in, their arms were raised. As they exhaled a breath, their arms came down. I asked if anyone else wanted to add moves, explaining how important it is to stretch. There was some giggling and suggestions on how to stretch offered by the students and teachers.

With each suggestion, I pointed out where I felt the stretch, since I had studied Anatomy and Physiology before becoming certified as a Health Spa Instructor. As the class was getting ready to sit down, Norman made a remark about how handicapped people don't exercise because they can't. I explained that handicapped people do exercise. Norman asked how. I explained that you can exercise even if you are in a wheelchair.

Then I told Norman and the class that one of my rabbinic classmates is in a wheelchair. I told the class that the classmate is a midwife. When they said they didn't know what a midwife is, I explained that it is a nurse who helps deliver babies, and yet she is also a rabbi! There were slight gasps of amazement. I also added that she is very good at Spiritual Direction. [I had been certified by a Massachusetts state accredited course of study taught in collaboration with a Long Island affiliate of the Women's World Health Spa New England based fitness organization and the New England Physical Fitness governing organization.]

At this time I explained that we were going to review the book *Martin's Big Words: the Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Rappaport. I asked who he was. Melvin explained that he was named Jr because his father was also Martin Luther King. There was then a question if there was another Martin Luther King Jr. Teacher Koro Terroade pointed out that there is a Martin Luther King, Jr the III, the son of Martin Luther King, Jr. I explained in that case, a number goes after the Jr. I asked where Martin Luther King,

Jr prayed. Norman answered, "In a church." I asked what Martin Luther King, Jr did when he went to church. Melvin answered, "He prayed." I asked what happened to Martin when he grew up. Melvin answered that he became a minister. Norman asked what a minister is. I explained that it is a clergy person.

Norman then asked if it was a white church. I said that due to segregation, at the time, that it was a black church. Norman then said that a black principal could get in trouble if there was a white only sign at the school. I explained that Martin Luther King, Jr. got the idea for non-violence from Gandhi who was from India, pointing out that today if you make a call, maybe about a bill or your credit card, you might be connected to someone in India. None of the students were aware of this, but mention was made of seeing Indian people in 7 - Eleven stores. Norman said that that was the only reason he liked Indians. I said that that was sad and that we are so segregated that the only way we meet each other is in that setting.

Melvin ended up saying something to the effect that he would take his girlfriend out to an Indian restaurant which made for interesting discussion regarding whether Melvin actually had a girlfriend. I turned the discussion to stereotyping, asking if the students knew any Arab people. They said no. I then told the story of how the congregation of the Jewish Centre invited the men of the mosque to visit, asking if the students knew the word mosque. Melvin answered that the word was familiar. I explained that it is a place of worship for Muslims. Then some members of the congregation visited the mosque. Each member saw what it was like to pray in a respective house of worship.

When I asked what the name of the African American woman was who didn't want to sit at the back of the bus, Patrick surprised us all by saying "Rosa Parks". Melvin got

mad at Patrick since he wanted to say it first. I then pointed out that we need to give a chance for people who don't speak too much to have a chance to talk. Then I asked if Martin Luther King, Jr's faith had influenced him to stand up for injustice in the world. Melvin said that he didn't know what I was talking about. Someone else said that Martin Luther King, Jr felt good about himself. Then discussion turned to Martin Luther King, Jr getting the idea on his own, without his father's help.

Mention was made that he just woke up one day with an idea. I then mentioned commercials as a way that people get ideas. I used a recent television commercial slogan of "Windows was my idea" referring to the computer. Then students started talking about smart phones. I asked if smartphones could have an impact in today's world. Melvin said yes. Norman said no. Then he pointed out that he is probably the only kid without a phone. My heart sank. I didn't want a child of a certain economic situation to feel bad due to the limited finances of his family.

I asked why Martin Luther King, Jr won the Nobel Peace Prize. Melvin said, "It's because he said like give us peace!" Norman said, "It's because he said 'I have a dream...' to win the Nobel Peace Prize." Melvin said, "I had a dream that black boys and black girls held hands with white boys and white girls." Norman joked, "What about Caucasians?" I asked how the students felt when we were playing instruments. Melvin said, "I felt like we just had to use a stick." I pointed out that they didn't have to think about much while they were playing instruments.

Melvin agreed. I asked if it was possible to pray using instruments. There was an emphatic yes! Norman joked about a heavy metal band. In order to determine if we can use instruments in prayer, I asked, "What is prayer?" Melvin answered, "Communicating

with God.”

Then I asked, “Can you pray to God through an instrument?” There were two emphatic yes replies. Melvin said you can pray to God in the instrument. I asked if they had heard of the word spirituality. Melvin said, “Yes. It's when you meditate.” I was unexpectedly and pleasantly surprised at this response! I asked students to get their journals out as I prepared to read Psalms.

Someone asked right away to use instruments. From the book *Psalms for Young Children* by Delvel I read Psalms 9, 13, 18, and 23 and explained that I wanted the students to think about writing their own psalms and thinking about how they would talk to God. One student started using the rain stick which added greatly to my reading of the psalms. I explained that the sound of the rain stick sounded like rain. As I finished one psalm and got ready to start another, a student said “Bring the rain.” The student turned the rain stick over and the students kept their attention as I read another psalm.

More students wanted to participate with instruments. As someone started to play drums, I explained that if they were happy playing instruments, it is as if they are singing the psalms. As I read Psalm 18, I asked the students to contemplate how they would describe God. The instrumental accompaniment sounded great. This continued as I read Psalm 23. Then, the students were told to write a prayer in their journals.

Since there was so much interest in the instruments, I agreed to play another song on my guitar called “The Waters of Healing” by Dr. Rabbi Shohama Weiner. Someone else used the rain stick and it sounded great together. I explained that Dr. Rabbi Shohama Weiner was the head of the rabbinical school where I had studied, as well as the Head of the Spiritual Direction Program. I explained that Dr. Rabbi Shohama Weiner was going to

be honored for her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday soon. [This took place in May 2012]

There were some “wows”. I explained that I also had played “The Waters of Healing” song to people in the hospital, explaining the Hebrew: ‘ana El na, refanala’ means ‘please God, heal her’ and is the shortest prayer in the torah. I asked, “Who in the bible, the torah, says that?” Melvin said, “Moses.” Once again I was pleasantly surprised that a student knew the answer. I explained that Moses said these words to God in the hopes of healing his sister Miriam. I then realized a connection to our lesson regarding black and white. I explained that the Midrash (an explanation by rabbis) as to why Miriam's skin turns white is because she is gossiping about Moses having a Cushite black wife. I explained that Miriam is being racist against a black person.

Then I explained that Miriam's punishment is a skin condition in which her skin turns white. I explained that we are not white like the wall. If we were white like that, then we would be very sick. Miriam was sick. Then I explained that I would be away next week, but the teachers and I would develop a lesson plan for them. The class discussion concluded with what the class would be doing for Purim.

**Thursday February 16<sup>th</sup> Lesson Plan Goal:** To discuss and ponder the concept of communicating with God. Examine how King David talked with and about God through his “journaling” in the Psalms. Prepare for the Jewish holiday of Purim and the class presentations before the congregation on that day.

**Multiple Methods/Multiple Exercises:** Discuss Purim and read the story of Esther. Talk about Israel’s existence in relation to Purim and other historical events. Practice *Purim International* by Meish Goldish and make flags to go along with the story.

Rehearse: *The Never-Ending Phone Menu* by Len Getz, which is a skit about

frustration with an automated phone answering system at a synagogue. This skit was published with permission from the author and the 'Motzi Shabbas Players' of the Lower Merion Synagogue in Lower Merion, Pennsylvania, on a Jewish website called myjewishlearning.com and is available for use by synagogues for their Purim shpiels (which is a Yiddish word for skits).

**Procedure:** Hand out journals. Discuss concept of talking with God. Have students pair up and talk about what they think God is like and if they think God thinks about them. Read and discuss Psalms 27, 28, 32, 34. Prepare to ask students the following questions that correlate with specific psalms. Regarding Psalm 27, ask the following questions: Have you ever been scared? Do you think God protects you? Regarding Psalm 28, Ask the following question: Does God hear us when we pray, when we're crying or in pain? Regarding Psalm 32, ask the following question: Have you ever been forgiven for doing something wrong? Regarding Psalm 34, ask the following question: How does the writer feel about God? Write in journal what you would say if you were to have a conversation with God.

Regarding Purim ask the following questions to the students: What does Purim mean? What do you remember about the story? Read the story of Esther. What is unique about this story? Even though God wasn't mentioned, does that mean God wasn't present? Does it seem that God is sometimes hidden from our lives? For what purpose did Mordecai say Esther had become Queen? Has any other person or nation attempted to destroy the Jewish people? Why do you think God has preserved Israel and the Jewish people? What comes to your mind when you think about Israel?

Thoughts to ponder in preparation for teaching the students: Stories are powerful.

Each of us is a Torah. Can Spiritual Direction be a personal tool that teaches a moral lesson as well as or even better than standard liturgy, sermons or bible stories?

Keep in mind the various uses of normative God talk, Orthodox G-d talk, and Jewish Renewal G!d talk. There are variations in writing God's name in English. There are two different traditions of replacing the "o" between the letters "G" and "d". The Orthodox may replace the "o" letter with a hyphen between the letters "G" and "d", while Jewish Renewal affiliates may use an exclamation point to replace the middle letter.

**Results from the class on Thursday February 16, 2012:** Present were Anthony, Brian, Darren, David, Melvin, Norman, Patrick and Teachers Tiqvah Terroade and Koro Terroade who taught the class in my absence. I was attending to my classes at the NewYork Theological Seminary Multi Faith Studies Program which is part of the Doctorate in Ministry, in conjunction with the Spiritual Direction Program of the Aleph Institute. I recorded the class on a cassette recorder and transcribed word for word what was said while I was away.

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade explained that they would be discussing the idea of talking with God. Melvin said "I don't think you can talk to God." Norman pointed out that there are a lot of people talking to God, insinuating that God cannot hear everyone. Teacher Koro Terroade said that Norman had made a good observation. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade affirmed Norman's comment, explaining that when she was young she imagined there would be a long line (of people wanting to talk to God).

A student mentioned that God doesn't talk to you verbally but through objects. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade affirmed that God can talk to you through nature or through another person. Students started chiming in with responses. One student mentioned that

he had to flip a coin 50 times and record the answers making a comment about the power of God. The students seemed to have a common reference point in the experiment that was being mentioned. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade referred to a past activity in class. It was a bible trivia game. She reminded the student how he prayed while rolling the dice so that God would help him.

Some students remarked how much they liked the bible trivia game and wanted to play. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade explained that they would be doing projects later for Purim. There was then a chant of Yoga! Yoga! Yoga! Teacher Tiqvah Terroade continued that it may seem like a strange concept to talk to God. You may wonder, “Am I talking to the air? Is anyone listening?” Boys were paired up to talk about, “What is God like?” and “Do you think that God thinks about you?” Anthony and Melvin, Darren and Norman, and Brian, David and Patrick were paired together.

When groups gathered back together in one class, Teacher Koro Terroade asked for a report from the teams. Darren said that God is awesome. “He is so awesome that you can't imagine how awesome he is!” Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out that there is a verse in Tanakh that says that God's understanding is unlimited. Norman said that God can't understand him. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out that God understands all languages. Norman repeated a past sentiment voiced earlier that he is hungry. Melvin started reciting a Hebrew formula Baruch Ata Adonai (meaning Blessed are You God...) Norman laughed and repeated this. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out that in Psalms God has named every single star. This same teacher pointed out that in Isaiah, “I know every one of you by name.” One student joked, “He knows where I live, ha, ha!”

After reading Psalm 27 from *Psalms for Young Children* by Delvel, Teacher Tiqvah



Terroade asked if a student would share about when he was scared. Norman spoke about chain letters that can be found on email or Youtube which says that bad things can happen to you if you do not continue sending the chain letters to others, like “You can die in three days.” Melvin pointed out they are not true. Norman said that he should be scared of them when he is dying. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out that it is creepy.

Melvin shared a story of how when he was six, driving in the car with his mother, a bat flew in, went in his hair, and then they threw it out in the garbage. Anthony spoke about how one time when he was at the zoo feeding goats, the goat started to swallow his shirt.

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade shared a very scary story about Israel. While in Israel, she heard an explosion in which her windows shook. It had been a suicide bomber, a few blocks away that had blown his self up in a restaurant, killing people inside. After that the teacher was afraid to walk outside her gated dormitory. She was terrified to leave there and go into a public place. Although the teacher was paralyzed with fear, she thought about God and that her life is in God's hands, trusting that God would protect her.

David then asked Teacher Tiqvah Terroade what religion the suicide bomber was. Melvin started talking about video games in which there are grenades, etc. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade read Psalm 28 from *Psalms for Young Children* by Delvel asking afterwards, “Does God hear us when we pray?” One student answered, “Nope!” Melvin said that it depends. Anthony said He wouldn't hear us on the other side of the world, because then He would have to run to hear us....He would have to go back and forth. Another student shouted, “He's God, he does whatever he wants to!”

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade asked if God can be everywhere at once. A student said, “Yes.” Anthony then changed his earlier response saying, “Maybe God can hear us because people talk on their phones...” Another student added, “...with secret numbers”. Some laughed. Another student joked, “1-800-HEAVEN?” Melvin added, “Maybe all the (telephone) operators are God...talking in a robot voice.”

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out that there is a photo of a man praying at the Western Wall in Israel while talking on a cell phone. The caption reads, “Direct line to God.” The teacher also pointed out that there is a joke that says, “Calling God from anywhere in the world is a long distance call except in Israel, where it's a local call.” Discussion was then made about Skype, how those calls are free if both people have Skype. The teacher pointed out that since God has downloaded God's image into each of us, we also can talk for free.

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade read Psalm 32 from *Psalms for Young Children* by Delvel and asked, “Have you ever been forgiven for doing something wrong?” Melvin answered, “Well, I don't know...because I guess I never really asked God to forgive me. I asked a person to forgive me if I liked them. If someone I don't like, then I don't ask for forgiveness.” The teacher asked Melvin how he felt after he asked for forgiveness from a friend. He said that he felt like a jerk. Melvin said, “I can buy friendship back from his friends. That's how my friends work. I'll give you a dollar and he says OK.” Darren said, “Give it back in candy.”

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade read Psalm 34 from *Psalms for Young Children* by Delvel and then asked what the author King David was feeling. Melvin said, “He felt that God was listening to him.” The students then had a chance to write in their journals. The

question to be answered is, “What would you say if you were to have a conversation with God?” David did not write anything. Melvin wrote, “What's a good strategy to make me a millionair?” Then he drew a picture of a wizard saying, “You shal not pass!” Melvin found an illustration included in his journal, which is included from a book entitled *The Three Javelinas* written by Susan Lowell and illustrated by Jim Harris. Melvin added the caption “In God we trust” to the illustration in his journal.

Patrick drew a picture of himself praying with the caption “I'm praying.” He also wrote, “Can I live forever and be.” Norman drew a picture of a person crying saying “I'm Hungry.” A caption above (God) says, “Shut up kid.” Underneath is: “God Hates Me”. A short while later I was able to see the class, collect the journals and say hello. With me I had brought a bad of rugeleh which are kosher Jewish pastries. After class, Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out to Norman that his prayers were answered and he showed her an expression of amazement and awe.

In Darren's journal he had also drew pictures of food including a cup cake and a banana. Darren asked the question, “Why are people mean?” Although Brian had been in the room, he did not participate in the class discussion or in writing in his journal. Anthony wrote, “How were you created or where were you created? Also, can I have a burrito?” Anthony drew a picture of a person in a car with the caption “G-d giving me a burrito.” Next to the person in the car is a burrito which is the same size. Underneath is a big arrow above the word “Burrito.”

Regarding the tool of journaling, the goal is for the students to realize that this is one way to communicate to God by getting in touch with their own G!d sparks. This enhances the inner work of connecting with one's own self, as we all are created in God's

image. Reflecting and connecting through the act of putting one's thoughts on paper sets the groundwork for journaling as an adult. For many adults, they learn these meaningful and powerful tools later in life. Why not teach children these useful tools as children?

Since the sentiments of the journal writings were that the class was hungry, I felt God's Presence was with me when I grabbed the bag of rugeleh (Jewish cookies) on the way to see the class! Fortuitously the students may have come to the conclusion that God really does answer prayers, and sometimes right in the course of the class. For children, this was a lesson in modern miracles, albeit a very small one to nurture one's hunger. In maturity, the thirst for spirituality can also be quenched by integrating the tools learned as children and adolescents.

**Thursday March 1, 2012 Lesson Plan Goal:** To discover God on the journey of our lives, employing Jewish books as tools for providing information, sparking the imagination, and giving an historical Jewish role model. Also, we will build further upon spiritual tools such as listening, reflecting, discussing, and participation in: Jewish Music, Jewish Yoga, and Jewish Journaling.

**Multiple Methods:** In order to illicit responses in the form of discussion and journaling, the following Jewish books will be used: *Images of God for Young Children* by Marie-Helene Delval, *Psalms for Young Children* by Marie-Helene Delval, *What Does God Look like?* by Lawrence and Karen Kushner, *Alef-Bet Yoga for Kids* by Ruth Goldeen and *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela* by Uri Schulevitz.

**Procedure:** Integrate a Jewish historical story about traveling as a mechanism for introducing the idea that our lives are a journey and that God accompanies us on that journey. Use the journal as a way for students to process their thoughts on a deeper level.

Read psalms and use a question/answer format as follows: Psalm 42: How do you need God? What wisdom has God shown you? Psalm 46: When did you feel that God had helped you not to be scared? Psalm 47: How do you express your appreciation to God? What words can you think of that express how powerful God is? Psalm 51: What is forgiveness and how does forgiveness work? Students will use journals for answering the questions. [Based on *Psalms for Young Children* which is an unpagged book]

**Results from class on March 1, 2012:** Anthony, Brian, Darren, David, Melvin, Norman, Patrick, Teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade and I, (Rabbi Leslie Schotz) am in attendance. The book *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela* was read in order to provide a context for the idea of the “journey of our lives.” I then asked students if they had ever traveled somewhere; taken a trip. For David this was the first time he had shared in class in a significant way. He explained how he went on a plane for the first time to visit his mother's sister in Florida. In the process a kid who is 16 years old, was giving him ‘death stares’ because David was sitting next to the boy's father. (Since David's father had just suffered a heart attack, it was heartening that David had felt prompted to share this story.) David explained that when he got to Florida, “it was pretty fun.” It had taken four class sessions for David to come out of his shell to contribute to the class in this way.

A few students shared that they had traveled nationally and internationally. At this point I posed the question to the class: What is a journey? Darren said that you had to go somewhere at night. Melvin said that it doesn't matter when, as long as it's a long distance. That started to get the class thinking. One student asked if it mattered how long it was because he heard someone say, “I went on a journey to my refrigerator.” Students offered different responses as to how they would define a journey.

One: It could take a long time. Another: It doesn't have to do with the time; it has to do with the distance. Third theory: It could just be going from one point to another. Norman said that if it's going to take an effort, even if it's within your own house, then it's a journey. Then I said, "Let's think of the idea of a journey taking effort." Then I asked, "Have you ever heard of this idea that life is a journey?"

The students responded yes. Melvin said that you have to do something. I asked what. He said "walk" and "breathe". I thought this was simple yet profound. Norman commented that if people chose not to breathe, they would be committing suicide. Then I posed the question regarding global warming. "If we were to have such a bad global warming that you couldn't breathe anymore, is that kind of the same thing?"

There was silence. I continued, "If you had no more oxygen left in the world because you didn't take care of the earth..." Norman interrupted me to say "that's not going to happen because there are trees." I explained statistics about rainforests being cut down every few minutes. Melvin explained that if you care about the trees, they just care about the money.

At this point, I shared a true story about how I tutored a Spanish young man who worked for his father's company which cut down rainforests in South America. I explained that all the educational materials I used to teach the student English revolved around saving the earth and the rainforest. My purpose was to make the point that we can have the power to make a difference in the world through our personal interactions.

"How is God present in the journey of your lives?" I asked. David said he didn't understand the question. I then said, "How is God part of the journey of your lives?" Melvin replied, "He helps us find our way to our destiny." Darren said, "He's the

narrator.” Norman said that God is a stalker because he watches us 24/7. I then asked, “What does God look like?” Brian replied, “I am not sure.” I then read, *What Does God Look Like?* by Lawrence and Karen Kushner.

Norman said, “God makes the world go round.” Melvin said “Maybe the world is like God's head.” Darren said, “We're all in God's imagination.” Then Melvin said, “Or maybe just God is in our imagination.” It was delightful to hear heated conversations taking place on this subject. Time was slipping away and we had to prepare for the Jewish holiday of Purim. Each class was expected to make a presentation in synagogue on the holiday and I suggested that students choose a Hebrew letter to demonstrate in movement in front of the congregation.

At this point, we started to look through the Hebrew Jewish yoga poses demonstrated in *Alef-Bet Yoga for Kids* by Goldeen. Norman suggested that we find a Hebrew word with five letters and have each student demonstrate a letter. As we started looking through the poses, students didn't feel comfortable demonstrating the more complex stretches and bends. David called out the letter ‘vav’ because it was as simple as standing up straight. Brian chose the ‘tzadee’. Anthony chose ‘mem’. Darren chose ‘noon’. Patrick chose ‘tav’. Norman did not want to participate.

Since some students had to leave early, I asked a question to the group for them to journal. “How does God become part of your life on the journey of your life?” At this point I read from *Psalms for Young Children* by Delvel in order to give the students ideas. I read Psalms 42, 46, 47, 51. Then I asked the following questions to the students. Psalm 42: How do you need God? What wisdom has God shown you? Melvin said that we need God to survive. Psalm 46: When did you feel that God had helped you not to be

scared? Psalm 47: How do you express your appreciation to God? What words can you think of that express how powerful God is? Melvin started to pronounce the first two words of a Hebrew prayer formula that begins: Baruch Atah (meaning Blessed are You [God] ) Psalm 51: What is forgiveness and how does forgiveness work?

I had pointed out to Norman and the class that there is a blessing that we say thanking God after going to the bathroom since earlier Norman had responded to the journey question by positing that a person could go on a journey to go the bathroom in his own house. I used this seemingly crazy comment as a way to explain that there is a very important blessing associated with something as seemingly mundane or even profane as going to the bathroom. This physical act has an intention behind it that makes us mindful of how our physical well being is connected to these bodily functions. There is a blessing that is recited by observant Jews every time he or she finishes using the bathroom.

It is the Hebrew “asher yatzer” blessing which thanks God for the marvel of our functioning bodies. We say thank you to God for keeping the bodily openings of our bodies open and the bodily closings of our body closed. If one of our open bodily openings was closed, or conversely if a bodily closing was open that wasn’t supposed to be, we could die. Norman expounded on how constipation was toxic to the body and could become serious to the inner cavities of the body. In Norman’s journal, he drew a picture of a man in the bathroom with a window in which God is looking in the window.

In response to the questions regarding God and the psalms, Darren wrote “You need him when you want someone to pull the fire alarm at school Joke You need him when



your in doubt. Or when you have a serious problem. When you need forgiveness. When your playing a board game”

Brian wrote in his journal the following: “G-d becomes a part of life because he guide me showing me a path of success. I need G-d to help me Show me the way to go and what I need to do. The wisdom of guidance.” David wrote “forgiveness is when you feel sorry for someone and apologize and if he/she accepts it.” Patrick wrote “We could not live or survive praying feel bad and forgive someone about something” Melvin and Darren did not write in their journals. When allowed to play instruments, the students loved using the drums and rain sticks. I played a verse from Psalm 90: 12 in Hebrew and English called called “Limnot Yameinu” on my guitar while students played their chosen instruments with fervor. (The arrangement I used was composed by Rabbi Yitzchak Husbands-Hankin. The English translation is: "Teach us to treasure each day, that we may open our hearts to Your wisdom.")

**Thursday March 15, 2012 Lesson Plan Goal:** To experience God and contemplation of God through music, dance and movement.

**Method/Exercises:** Allow students to connect to the psalms using music and create their own psalms with instruments. Use Psalm 150 as a model of creating psalms with music. Use *Praying with the Body* by DeLeon and *Psalms for Young Children* by Delvel.

**Procedure:** Introduce Psalm 150 in Hebrew from the Conservative prayer book *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* and facilitate discussion on psalms, music and God connection with the following questions and a possible answer: What kind of music do you listen to? (Maybe students access it through a smart phone). What is the message of the music? Do you agree with this message? Can we communicate with God

through music? Include discussion about Passover. Read about Passover in *First Book of Jewish Bible Stories* by Mary Hoffman.

**Results from Thursday March 15, 2012:** Anthony, Brian, Darren, David, Melvin, Norman, Patrick, Teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade and I, (Rabbi Leslie Schotz) am in attendance.

The class began with me asking the question: “Any thoughts about Spiritual Direction, being a Holy Listener?” Norman said: “Being a monk.” I then remarked about music being a way to communicate with God. Norman said “Death metal”. When asked to explain what it is, Norman said “awesome.” Many of the students started commenting on this music explaining that there is a lot of screaming, and it is psychotic and emotionally disturbed. Melvin said he likes to listen to rap, “rap all the way.” Melvin chastised Norman for not agreeing to make a rap for Purim on Facebook.

At this point I read Psalm 150 to the students, first pointing out that many psalms begin with Halleluyah. Although Melvin then added “It's raining men, halleluyah”, he also added that Halleluyah means Praise the Lord. It was impressive to know that Melvin knew the meaning of Halleluyah. Then I read the psalm in Hebrew. The students recognized the word “shofar” as a Hebrew word that they knew. I explained that an English translation could include drums, harp, flute, strings and cymbals. As soon as I mentioned that they would be enacting the psalm with real instruments, shouts of praise could be heard!

We used two bongo drums, a tambourine, a Native American hand drum, a shakere, two rain sticks, a base recorder, and a guitar. Seven students, two teachers and I (the rabbi) played instruments. One teacher put down her instrument to record the experience

on camera. I asked: “If there were any words to put to the music, what would they be?” One student said, “God”. When three shofars were handed to the students, an amazing call and response of shofars was demonstrated by Melvin and Patrick. Students were excited to try and make a sound on the shofar. The expression of the students sounding the shofars was awe inspiring and evocative of soulful biblical sounds.

I then asked the students to take out their journals and write what it was like playing the shofar; blowing the shofar. Then I pointed out how we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Patrick volunteered to demonstrate tekia, one long blast, shevarim, three medium blasts and teruah, nine short blasts.

In Norman's journal he wrote “Indian Death Metal I played the drums”. On the next page Norman drew a picture of a person, which Norman had pointed out in class, is actually God sitting at a table with God's laptop. There is a smile on God's face and a bag labeled “chips”.

Darren wrote “It is really hard. I play the vocal chords” with a picture of a person outside under the sun. The message above reads “I'm here for you.” Anthony wrote “It was very difficult for me to play.” On the next page Anthony drew a stick figure of a person with large eyes, an open mouth and outstretched arms and legs. Emanating from the head are the following sentences “I feel like I'm in an endless time warp between forgiveness and sadness.” “I need to be connected with G-d” and “Praying really helps me feel better and it also helps me stay connected with G-d.”

David wrote “My lips hurt. Trombone.” On the next page he wrote “Forgiveness is when you feel sorry for someone and apologize and if he/she accepts it.” Two pages afterwards David wrote “Praying means talking to god and asking him for help.”

Melvin wrote “It hurts my lips playing the shofar and I play trombone.” Then half way through Melvin's journal he drew a stick figure of a person in water with the caption “I'm drowning”. Patrick wrote “ \*made lips hurt\* saxophone” On the next page Patrick drew a picture of a large amorphous face with two spiral ears, two eyes, an abstract nose and a big smiling face. Underneath are the words: “Talking to god and he hears you.”

Brian wrote “I was playing music for holiday it wasn't very good. We all tried” On the next page Brian wrote “It feels great to be helped by G-d it's a sigh of relief reading a psalm is good to listen and learn from.”

Next the students continued with an activity. I mentioned that book *Praying with the Body* by DeLeon. I explained that there are stick figures drawn depicting positions for expressing each verse of a psalm. The students were then asked the question: How would you pray with your body? As each student made movements with their torso, we imitated the positions indicated by the student. When I asked for a name for the movement by the student, he said “no.” Another student named it “lunge”. I then named the movement “Prayer Lunge.” Students had fun doing these exercises.

Norman liked roaring a lot. Melvin pointed out that Norman's screams were not relaxing. I pointed out to be mindful of the class. Next the class sat down to discuss Passover. When I asked what happened with Moses and God, Melvin answered, “They were connected.” I asked how? Melvin answered “Whenever Moses needed God, he prayed and God was like ' I'm right here for you.' ” I suggested that Melvin make a rap out of that.

I said, “Think about this whole idea of communicating with God. Moses communicated with God and God communicated with Moses. If God can communicate

with Moses, then maybe it's possible that God can communicate with others too.” Melvin pointed out that there is a lot of other people now, compared to the time of Moses, when there wasn't so many people. Now everyone is praying, asking God for help.

I pointed out the movie *Bruce Almighty*, in which Jim Carrey's character Bruce Nolan takes over for God so that God can go on a vacation. Brian remembered how Bruce Nolan can hear the thoughts of other people. Anthony pointed out that there were also emails on the computer. The students remembered that Morgan Freeman played God and Brian said he was awesome. Anthony says that Morgan Freeman (playing God) gave Jim Carrey (playing Bruce Nolan) his powers to hear people's prayers.... and he walked on water. I pointed out that in the Torah we hear God referred to as “he”.

“Is God a he or a she?” I asked. The students said neither. Someone said that God is an It. Another student said God sounds like a guy name. Another student mentioned Goddess. Norman then said that God is an enormous Rottweiler. Melvin said all the other gods are demi gods. As we continued to read “Moses in the Bulrushes” from *First Book of Jewish Bible Stories* by Hoffman, I explained that Moses means “taken from the water”.

Encouraging students to write in their journals I read from *Psalms for Young Children* by Delvel including Psalm 69, “When I am sad, it feels like I'm underwater, like I'm stuck in the mud, or at the bottom of a dark hole. Pull me from this dark place, God! Save me! I need your help!”<sup>147</sup> I asked, “Does this remind you of anytime you have been like this? What is this psalm trying to say?” Melvin said that someone is under water.

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<sup>147</sup> Marie Helene Delvel. *Psalms for Young Children* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans' Books for Young Readers, 2008).

Norman said “You can feel very scared.” I asked what the emotion was. David answered “sadness”.

Norman said, “Just watch home videos when you are sad and you will be laughing.” “You won't be depressed. You will be laughing so much.” I said that while you are listening to the psalms, if you are not inspired, makeup your own psalm. Norman asked, “You can make up your own psalm?” I said you can make up a rap psalm or a death metal psalm. I continued reading. Psalm 70, “Help me, God, I am worried! Please hurry up! I know that you are strong. You are the only one who can help me.” I then asked, “How could you take a song you liked and make it about God?”<sup>148</sup>

Norman mentioned pop singer Lady Gaga's *Poker Face* song. I asked, “Do you ever pretend to be one way when you are actually another way?” Melvin answered an adamant “Yes!” I asked, “Do you think that God knows the difference?” Melvin again answered “Yes. That is a sin. You will not go up here. You will go down there.” I then asked the class to take a moment of silence. Norman said “We are going to play the silent game. Start! ” The class held a few moments of silence. Then I continued reading Psalm 84, “Like a mama bird who has found a nest for her baby chicks, God, you provide a safe, warm place for me, your child.”<sup>149</sup>

At this point I asked to hear every one's voice. “Part of Spiritual Direction is having the ability to listen to other people. Sometimes it is a time to talk. Sometimes there's a time not to talk, but rather to listen.” As we went around the room, Melvin said “I don't know.” I said it's ok not to know. Anthony asked if he could say something about the

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

psalms and being connected to God. I said yes. Anthony couldn't think of anything more. I said that he gave a good summary. Darren asked if he was being interviewed. Norman interjected "I will eat your soul". I pointed out that this is a time for listening. Darren said "Hi." I asked, "Can you say that in Hebrew?" Darren answered Shalom.

Melvin then started singing the Hebrew *Shalom Aleichem* (The English translation to the title of this prayer is: *Peace to You*, referring to the Shabbat angels that are invited to join us on Friday night at sundown, the beginning of Shabbat.) I reminded the students that listening might actually be a little harder than it seems. I said, "Listening takes some self-control." I asked what Brian had to offer the group. Brian said that he had nothing to offer the group because they are all very loud. Brian said "I think we should all just be very quiet, the whole class one time." I thanked Brian. Norman then asked, "What are we supposed to say again?" When there was no answer, Norman said "I have 242 subscribers on YouTube!" I asked what video he made. Norman said that he didn't want to tell.

At Patrick's turn he said, "Nothing." David said, "I don't know." I pointed out that it is not important as to what you are saying, but that we have a chance to hear your voice. I then asked for students to write in their journals. Norman asked if he could draw anything. I said, "I would like you to write about communicating with God, maybe music, a prayer..." Norman said that he was going to draw a picture of talking to God, but God is too busy on his laptop with a bag of chips. I divided the students and approached each student encouraging him to write in his journal.

I then gathered the students together in order to pray with body, mind and soul as I read a psalm in the book *Praying with the Body* by DeLeon. As I followed the stick figure illustrations from the book, reading the psalm and then demonstrating the prayer with my

arms, legs, and torso, it surprised me that the students participated. I remarked that I thought that more people would feel like praying if they could express themselves more extensively with the movement of their bodies. Then I asked, “Would you rather sit in synagogue or would you rather do something like this?” The students answered, “This”.

I instructed the students to concentrate on their breath by breathing in and breathing out while I recited words of psalms as illustrated in the book. Then I directed the students in breath, and the students liked the additional direction of being able to move in a freestyle manner. I asked questions as they were moving. “What’s the main message of Passover?” Darren answered “The Angel of Death passing over the houses of the Jews.” Another student answered, “We left Egypt.” Melvin said that we survived walking in the desert all those years. Norman said that we have to suffer by not eating any bread products. I pointed out the message of freedom. Once we were slaves and now we are free people.

**Thursday March 22<sup>nd</sup> Lesson Plan Goal:** Make students comfortable enough to express how they view God and to encourage a relationship with God. Give students an example of others who had a relationship with God, so that they understand that this is available to them.

**Method/Exercises:** Take attendance in Hebrew. Students will answer “Ani Po”, meaning “I am Here.” Discuss current events; Let the students express themselves through music and instruments. Let students read the story of Moses from the Bible and hear their comments; Ask the students questions about Moses and God; Journal on paper about their response to God if they were told to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt. Celebrate Brian’s Life.



**Procedures:** Current Events: Students will share events that have happened in their own lives as well as on the news, such as: The France shooting of 3 Jewish children and a Rabbi. Question: Is God still present in tragic events like this one? The Psalms were often written when the psalmist was going through very difficult times. Share what one psalmist wrote: *Psalm 46:*<sup>1</sup> *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.* <sup>2</sup> *Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,* <sup>3</sup> *though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*<sup>150</sup>

Regarding Music: (Possibly) Go downstairs to play instruments. Play a Hebrew Song (Psalm) together. Re gather to read in the *Illustrated Jewish Bible for Children* by Hastings including the following stories: *Moses in the Bulrushes, Moses is Called by God, Moses Warns the Pharaoh.*<sup>151</sup>

Questions: How would you describe Moses? How would you describe God in this story? How would you describe Moses' relationship with God? Can we communicate with God today the way Moses did so long ago? Does God still speak and interact with people the way God did with Moses? What did Moses say to God when he was told to bring God's people out of Egypt? Journal on paper: If you were Moses and God told you to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt, what would you say?

Offer a special blessing for Brian's Birthday: Each person is custom made for a purpose in life. Birthday Blessing: *Psalm 139*<sup>13</sup> *For you created my inmost being; you*

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<sup>150</sup>New American Standard Bible, "Psalm 46: 1-3,"  
<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2046&version=NIV> (accessed 22 March 2012).

<sup>151</sup> Selena Hastings. *The Illustrated Jewish Bible for Children* (NY: DK Publishing, Inc., 1994) 63-73.

knit me together in my mother's womb.<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.<sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!<sup>18</sup> Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand— when I awake, I am still with you<sup>152</sup>. Present Brian's gift. It is a stuffed animal Ze'ev which is Hebrew for Wolf, which is Brian's Hebrew name.

What does the wolf and lamb have to do with each other? Isaiah 11<sup>6</sup> The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.<sup>7</sup> The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.<sup>8</sup> The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.<sup>9</sup> They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.<sup>153</sup>

Isaiah 65<sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.<sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy

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<sup>152</sup> New American Standard Bible. "Psalm 139:13-18," <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139&version=NIV> (accessed 22 March 2012).

<sup>153</sup> Complete Jewish Bible, "Isaiah 11: 6-9," <http://niv.scripturetext.com/isaiah/11.htm> (accessed 22 March 2012).

*mountain,”<sup>154</sup> says the LORD.*

**Results from the class held on March 22, 2012:** Anthony, Brian, Darren, David, Melvin, and Patrick. Norman was absent. Teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade developed the lesson plan and taught the class.

Teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade encouraged the students to talk about current events. Students mentioned the killings in France and in Florida. In France, a rabbi and three other Jews were killed. In Florida an adult killed an unarmed boy. The movie: The Hunger Games was mentioned. There was a summary about how a girl has to kill people in order to earn food for her family.

Anthony shared more personally about having difficulty with a test in school. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade then took the opportunity to ask the question to all the students: Do you ever pray during tests in your school? Melvin answered “No”. Brian shared that he says, “Oh Lord, help me pass this.” Darren and Anthony said that they merely say, “Help!” Teacher Tiqvah said that it is a very natural thing to do. When we need help, we start praying.

Teacher Tiqvah shared that she has prayed too. Melvin then shared that he got detention for calling his teacher a Nazi because “She hates the Jewish people in my class.” Teacher Tiqvah asked, “Why did you say that?” Another student then chimed in “Shame on you.” Melvin shared that he realized after he said what he said, “I did not just say that....I spoke before I thought and the teacher said, 'Detention tomorrow morning.' ” Melvin continued to share that after the teacher gave him detention, a friend of his was so upset that Melvin was punished that his friend called the teacher a pedophile.

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<sup>154</sup>Complete Jewish Bible, “Isaiah 65: 24-25,” <http://niv.scripturetext.com/isaiah/65.htm> (accessed 22 March 2012).

Another student shared good news. His neighbor had a baby. Teacher Tiqvah responded to this segment of the lesson commenting on the nature of news, relaying sad news and killings including the Jewish children who were killed in France. Teacher Tiqvah added, “But do you think, even in your own lives that God is present, you know, when something really tough is going on, you know like getting detention?” Anthony shared that Brian has had detention three times already. Brian agreed, saying it's been four times.

Melvin felt he had to share another bit of news. He said that scientists had mistranslated the end of the world, it's actually the beginning. Teacher Koro asked Melvin to say a little bit more. Melvin said he doesn't know, but there's something that determines the end of the world, but it's not, it's the beginning. Brian then felt compelled to share that while he was watching a movie in Social Studies about World War I the teacher stopped the movie at the point at which someone was going to get shot, saying it was too violent.

Teacher Tiqvah then asked, “What kinds of things are violent or really difficult in the world today?” Brian said, “Everything”. Anthony said, “Rated R movies.” Melvin said, “Are you kidding me?” Darren laughed. Melvin mentioned racism and prejudices. Brian shared that they are talking about World War II in class. Brian's public school Social Studies teacher offered Brian the opportunity to leave class if he got too uncomfortable. Melvin asked if Brian left class. Brian answered that he would have lost points. Then Melvin said, “Or, maybe he would have let you and you still would have got the points.” Anthony added, “It's a 50 50 chance.”

Teacher Tiqvah mentioned the Holocaust and asked the question, “In tragedies like

this, is God still present? Where is God?” Melvin said, “Maybe He was buying groceries.” When Teacher Koro asked Melvin to be serious, Melvin answered differently. He said, “Maybe they did too much sins.” Anthony added, “Too many?” Melvin said, “Too much, too many, same thing.” Teacher Koro asked, “Do you think it was right with the people in France recently?” Teacher Koro said it's the same question. “Where was God in the Holocaust?” “Where was God in France?” Anthony said, “Maybe He's just seeing what we'll do, what this world has come to.”

Teacher Tiqvah then continued with the reading of Psalms. Teacher Tiqvah explained that the psalms are a record of the most joyous and saddest times in the psalmist's life. She said, “In Psalm 46 the psalmist wrote in a very difficult time.” Teacher Tiqvah read Psalm 46: 1-3<sup>155</sup> out loud to the students.

Melvin commented, “God made dinosaurs and killed dinosaurs and they all died. I bet they were all like, 'Yo!'” Anthony commented, “They were all killing each other.” Melvin agreed. “Yeah, we are all killing each other too.” Melvin said, “It's like the dinosaurs. We are always going to be at war, survival of the fittest.” Teacher Tiqvah mentioned that later she will share verses from Isaiah talking about a new heaven and earth. Darren then said, “H-e-double L”. Teacher Tiqvah pointed out that there is a She’ol in Hebrew which is the depths of the earth. It is a place of waiting in the bible, towards your eternal destination. Darren then said, “I have a question. Who made up the devil?”

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade mentioned in the Hebrew bible it says Satan. It is a Hebrew word and it means accuser. At this time the teachers explained that the students would be going downstairs to play their instruments.

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<sup>155</sup> New American Standard Bible, “Psalm 46: 1-3”.

After students played various instruments including bongo drums, bells, hand drums, a shofar, and rainsticks, Teacher Tiqvah Terroade prepared to teach the students a new song on her guitar based on Psalm 122: 6-7 entitled in Hebrew as “*Sha'alu Shalom Yerushalayim*” meaning “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem.” Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out that God not only asks us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, but peace in the world.

She asks, “Can you imagine the world will be at peace; no war?” Melvin said, “I can't imagine...” Darren interrupted, “It's impossible.” Melvin said, “It's impossible because sports would then be gone. There would be no more boxing.” Other students continued to play their instruments in the background including drums. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out that at one time boxing didn't exist.

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade asked, “Do you want the world to be at peace?” Melvin said, “I don't know. I just feel safer. A lot of people lose their jobs.” Teacher Tiqvah Terroade said that in the future when we are at peace, people won't be beating each other up. Melvin said it is necessary. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade said that in the future, God will provide. Melvin wasn't convinced. Darren asked, “What will happen to the skyscrapers?” Another student blew the shofar while another student made the sound of rain with a rain stick.

Teacher Koro Terroade asked for everyone's attention in order to learn the new song. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade sang the Hebrew words “*Sha'alu Shalom Yerushalayim*” with Teacher Koro Terroade. Then Teacher Koro Terroade joined in with his bass recorder while Teacher Tiqvah Terroade continued singing in Hebrew. Students joined in with their instruments including bells, drums and the shofar.

The next segment of the lesson revolved around biblical readings as a background for Passover. Teacher Koro Terroade asked questions to remind the students that the Israelites had become slaves in Egypt due to their relocation to Egypt in response to a famine. The class read the following chapters: *Moses in the Bulrushes*, *Moses is Called by God* and *Moses Warns the Pharaoh*<sup>156</sup> in the *Illustrated Jewish Bible for Children* by Helena Hastings.

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade asked the following question to be answered in a journal. “If you were Moses; if God told you to go to Pharaoh and say, ‘Let My people go,’ how would you answer God?” “What would you say to God if God spoke to you?” Anthony drew a man holding a question mark in his hand, standing by a burning bush. From the bush are the words “I need you to do something Moses. In a bubble above are the words, “I would tell G-D that I am going to need lots of help to do this.”

Darren wrote “I would say why me of all people have you chose me. Why am I so special. Why chose me to be your prophet.” Patrick drew a picture of a stick figure man with a smile and a hat. “I would do as god says to do.” David wrote, “I would tell god I will free the slaves.” Melvin wrote, “Nah Im good but thanks for the offer”

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade then offered a special birthday blessing for Brian in front of the class incorporating aspects of the Psalm 139 saying, “It is custom made for Brian.” She then said, “God has a purpose for each one of your lives. This is a birthday blessing for you Brian. For you; for God created your innermost being. God knit Brian together in his mother's womb and we praise God because Brian is fearfully and wonderfully made. And Your works are wonderful. We know that full well. Brian's frame was made in a

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<sup>156</sup> Hastings, Illustrated Bible, 63-73.

secret place. Brian was woven together in the depths of the earth. God's eyes saw Brian's unformed body and all the days ordained for Brian were written in God's book before one of them came to be. How precious to us are Your thoughts, oh God. How vast are some of them. If we were we to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When we wake and when Brian awakes, God is still with him, Happy Birthday Brian.”

Teacher Tiqvah continued, “We want to just bless you because you are very special Brian. We want to say a special prayer too. Like Moses talked to God for the people of Israel, we can talk to God too. Thank You God, Thank You HaShem. You are the God of Israel. You made Brian. You made each one of us. We just ask that You would bless him Lord on his fourteenth birthday so that he would continue hearing Your voice, and that You would guide him for all of his life. Amen.” I then stopped by to wish Brian a happy birthday and give him a chocolate bar from Israel. Teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade then presented Brian with a gift of two stuffed animals. One was a wolf. The other was a lamb. They also read the following passages.

*Isaiah 11<sup>6</sup> The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. <sup>7</sup> The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. <sup>9</sup> They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*<sup>157</sup>

*Isaiah 65<sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.*

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<sup>157</sup> Complete Jewish Bible, “Isaiah 11: 6-9.”



<sup>25</sup> *The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain," says the LORD.*<sup>158</sup>

Brian was very thankful for his gifts and the class was dismissed.

**Thursday March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Lesson Plan Goal:** To encourage students to tell their own story, put themselves in biblical Moses' place and re-contextualize the concepts of chametz (which is Hebrew for unleavened bread).

**Multiple Methods:** Journal responses to questions asking for information about their lives. Discuss current events; Read *Moses and the Burning Bush* by Simon. Present "Something to Think About" and "To Talk About" on last pages of book. Read *My First Passover Board Book* by Claire Lister. Do an activity relating to chametz. Use *Brainteasers from Jewish Folklore* by Rosalind Charney Kaye for a fun diversion.

**Procedure:** We will use balloons and the blowing up of balloons with air to symbolize the effect of yeast with flour. Then we will write character traits that God hates on balloons such as pride, arrogance, boastfulness, lies, wickedness, evil, chaos among people. Students will express themselves through music and instruments.

Give students journals to record answers to personal questions, Discuss current events, go downstairs to play instruments, re gather upstairs for discussion of books and implement chametz/balloon activity.

Students will share events that have happened in their own lives as well as on the news. Talk about the Florida shooting. Should kids be free to wear hoodies? Questions for students to get in touch with their own personal story: When were you born? Where

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<sup>158</sup> Complete Jewish Bible, "Isaiah 65: 24-25."

were you born? Do you have siblings? Do you have favorite relatives/ cousins? Where do you live? What do you remember about your first day at school? Who was your first friend? Who in school was nice? Who in school was mean? How are you different now from when you were little? What experiences have made you wiser? When did you first learn about God? Who explained God to you?

Discuss current events and then go downstairs to play instruments. Then continue with lesson of reading books, discussion and activity. Questions for discussion with books: What are some reasons you don't want to do what you are told? When is it hard to do as you are told? God and Moses had a conversation. When do you talk to God? How would you describe chametz, the leavening agent? How would you symbolize chametz in today's world?

**Results from the class on Thursday March 29, 2012:** Journals were handed out at the beginning of class. I said that I would like to talk about the idea that we each have our own torah. I said; "We each have our own story... Sometimes we don't even remember our own story. Someone has to tell us our story."

Brian responded right away. "I don't remember, I was told many times which hospital I was born in." Norman said, "I was born on a military base." I said, "You may have noticed that we have some people in this class who speak more than other people, and I am going to get everyone in this class talking. That is why I am going to ask you to write your own story....You are going to be writing it down and then we are going to be talking about it."

I instructed each student to write his name, the time when he was born, the date of his birth, where he was born, if he has any siblings with the names of his siblings, pets, if

he had favorite relatives or cousins, where he lives, what he remembers about his first day ever going to school, who his first friend was, who, in school, was nice to him, who, in school, was mean to him, how he is different now than when he was little, what lessons he has learned in his life, when he first learned about God and who explained God to him.

Brian began. "I was born March 23, 1998 in a hospital in Queens. I have one brother and one sister. I love my cat Midnight and all other animals. I don't have a favorite cousin and will probably never." (His cousin Darren said, "Hey... I'm going to erase you from my book.") Brian continued, "I live on Long Island, New York" Brian proceeded to give his home address. Brian then said, "My first day of school was exciting. My first best friend is Jake Ashley. Some or many people were nice to me in school. Teachers and bullies were sometimes mean to me." This information became a point of discussion for some of the students.

I observed that this kind of sharing was creating a natural discussion for the students. Brian continued, "For future reference, I am more mature and well behaved I guess. Some may disagree. I am considered the reliable one in my family. I'm taller, older, nicer, self - confident, relaxed and opening sometimes. One life lesson I've probably learned is being kind and loving. I respect and love animals. I first learned about Hashem when I was a toddler."

The teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade let out a collective Hmmm. "Ah." I said, "Very good. Thank you for going first. Going first is not always easy." Darren then went next. "I was born January 1999. My brother is Kyle and my favorite cousin is Anthony" (Anthony let out a yelp of appreciation) Darren continued, "I live in Long Island, in Lindenhurst. I am more mature and bigger and more awesome. The thing I learned is the

alphabet. God was first explained to me in Hebrew school.”

Anthony volunteered to share next, “I was born September 1, 1999 I think in Lindenhurst, New York. I have one brother and one sister. I despise the following animals: my sister's dog named Simon. I like all my cousins. I live in Lindenhurst...I was very shy in my first day of school and my teacher was mean to me. My first friend's name was Robert Spinzola. My first bully was a kid named Christopher, who punched me in the face in the cafeteria in school. I am more mature than I used to be and I have a lot more friends. I learned not to run in the house or else I will slip and hit my head into the wall and bleed to death. I don't know where I learned that God was real.” In Anthony's journal he wrote “I think I learned that G-D was real when I started Hebrew school, but I am not very sure when, or who I learned that G-D was real.”

Norman then spoke. “I was born June 28<sup>th</sup> in the year 2000. I was born in a hospital. I have a brother named Alex, a dog named Barry. I live in New York. I hate school. The teachers bore me. I am more mature. I learn math when I grow up. Yeah. That's it.” I asked Norman where he learned about God. He replied, “School.” I asked Norman who told him about God but he didn't remember. When asked who would go next, David pointed to Patrick and Patrick pointed to David. David decided to go next. He said, “I was born April 6, 1999 at Good Sam (which is short for Good Samaritan Hospital). I have one brother. His name is Arthur, a dog Violet. I live in Bay Shore, New York. I don't remember anything on the first day of school. I've changed by maturing and I learned about God when I was in Hebrew school.”

Patrick said, “I was born January 26, 2000 in Bay Shore. I have two brothers, one sister and a dog. I live in Bay Shore. My first friend was Nick Esposito and I know more

things.” Patrick did not know when he first learned of God. I then switched the focus to Current Events, asking if the students had heard about the Florida shooting. Brian said “Zimmerman is a liar. He has no rules. How is Trayvon going to attack him with Skittles?” I asked about the idea that was put forth that kids shouldn't wear hoodies

I pointed out that, as coincidence would have it, the three boys on the left of the couch all had hoodies on while the three boys on the other side of the couch did not. I asked, “Should we be worried more about this side of the room, since they are wearing hoodies?”

After the students became a bit animated, I then shifted discussion to Teacher Tiqvah Terroade. She asked “Have you ever heard of Gilad Shalit?” Some students answered no. Norman asked, “Didn't he get out two years ago?” I said “Your teacher Tiqvah Terroade was in Israel when he was captured!” Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out that was in 2006. It is now 2012. Teacher Tiqvah explained that Gilad Shalit was a soldier in the army. She said, “Back in 2006, when I was living in Israel, it was June 25, 2006 and it was early Sunday morning when people, some terrorists broke in through Gaza. He was serving there with some other guys and the other guys got killed. He was wounded. He broke his hand, with shrapnel in his hand and he was taken captive. Gilad Shalit was taken captive for FIVE years.”

I said that I didn't think there was much hope that he was alive, saying, “So many people are captured and how could it be possible to be alive after five years?” Teacher Tiqvah Terroade said they fed him a very minimal diet. I pointed out that he was a pudgy kid when they captured him. Five years later he was a skinny kid. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade said, “Bones. He was returned skin and bones.” I pointed out that the extra

weight was probably helpful in his survival.

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade continued, “Gilad Shalit was in a small little basement, way underground, without windows. He didn't see daylight and was just fed some hummus and pita so he was very skinny when he got out. A deal was made five months ago to let thousands of Palestinians out.” I said, “We should pose this question to you. So here's the deal. Do you think this is a good deal? In Israel, the idea to free any Jew, they are willing to do whatever it takes. Here's the deal the captors said to the Israelis, ‘Ok, we think we are going to release Gilad Shalit. In return we want a thousand prisoners, (who proved that they are dangerous to society, who may have killed people, essentially one thousand terrorists let out of prison) to free Gilad Shalit.’ Do you think they should have done it (the deal)?” Anthony said “No... because then they (the released prisoners) will kill other people.”

I asked, “Do you think his family thought it was a good deal?” One student answered yes. I continued, “Anyone close to Gilad, thought it was a great deal.” Other students objected saying they should have just snuck him out. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade pointed out that they tried. They tried to find him but they couldn't because he was so far underground.

Teacher Tiqvah Terroade added that his family wouldn't celebrate Passover or the holidays without a chair set for Gilad because they couldn't celebrate without him. Last Passover Gilad's family was outside of Prime Minister Netanyahu's house saying, “We want Gilad home.” Other Jewish families had one empty seat for Gilad Shalit with his name on there.

At this point the class prepared to go to another room to play instruments. In a room

located at the lowest level of synagogue, students were able to express themselves free style with instruments available to them including a shofar, rain sticks, bells, a recorder, a guitar, bongo drums, and Native American hand drums.

I then read from *Brainteasers from Jewish Folklore* by Kaye. The students tried guessing the riddles of three very short brainteaser stories. From *Moses and the Burning Bush* by Simon. I read to the students asking questions from the book including: “Why didn't Moses want to obey God?” Norman said, “Moses was scared of Pharaoh, not serious about slavery and Pharaoh was Moses' grandfather.” [I had neglected to correct Norman to tell him that Pharaoh was Moses' adopted father]

“What are reasons that you don't want to do as you are told? Do you always want to do everything you are told? Would you say you are like Moses too?” I continued. Some students answered yes. I asked, “So what are some reasons you don't do what you are told to do?” Students did not verbally respond to three of the above questions. “How does God help you to be obedient?” I continued. Anthony then said that he didn't take out the garbage when he was supposed to. Instead his brother Brian did it. Brian responded that Anthony is the lazy one.

This started a heated discussion among Anthony, Brian and Darren. Norman asked what time it is. I then asked Norman, which of the brothers (Anthony and Brian) would he classify as obedient? Norman said Brian is nice. Anthony is cool. I then asked, “Is being obedient not cool?” I said, “God appears to Moses in a burning bush. How do you see God in your mind?” Students said “I don't know.” I said, “God and Moses had a conversation. When do you talk to God?” Brian said, “When you sleep and dream I guess.” Anthony said, “When you're about to go to sleep.” Darren said, “At nighttime.”

I asked, “Have you ever had a dream where something unusual happened in the dream?” Anthony said, “No, maybe.” Norman mentioned how his mother always wakes him up as he is dreaming telling him it's time for school. Darren said that he has dreamt that something awesome was going to happen, and then his mother woke him up.

Then I read *My First Passover Board Book* by Lister. As we started to talk about Passover, Darren started to sing “Eliyahu Hanavi Eliyahu Hatishbi.” Norman continued, “Eliyahu comes to your house and drinks your wine!” It was good to see a spirited singing with creatively appropriate lyrics.

At this point we started a project. I reminded the class about matzah and asked, “What is the science behind the matzah? What is different from bread and matzah?” Answers included: flat, square, rectangle. I said that I was looking for a special answer. David answered “Unleavened.” I pointed out the Hebrew word is chametz (which means leavening in English). I said, “There's a whole idea that on Passover we get rid of the chametz, even inside of us, because we have spiritual chametz. So, what do you think is the personality of someone who has too much chametz in him?”

I pointed out that Teacher Tiqveh Terroade found a saying in Proverbs 6:16 mentioning behaviors which God hates. They included pridefulness, lying, murder, and running to do evil. Teacher Tiqveh Terroade and I were trying to find a link between personality and symbolic chametz, that which we would rid ourselves of in our wrong actions. Then we transitioned into the mitzvah of ridding the house of chametz.

“Before Passover we search the house for chametz,” I said, continuing “We need a feather, a spoon, and something else which is very important to finding it which is a lit candle. Teacher Tiqvah Terroade taught a lesson stemming from Proverbs 20:27,



pointing out that a person's spirit can be compared to a lamp of God searching their inner parts. I said that this is talking about something within our selves, our own personalities. I then asked again, "So how do you think that somebody who has a lot of chametz in him self, would act? What would his personality be like?"

Answers from two students were: mean and evil. I asked, "Would he be loud or quiet?" Students answered: loud. "Would he be humble or boastful?" Students answered loudly: "boastful!" I explained that Teacher Tiqvah and I thought of a way for the students to know how it feels to be full of chametz and then without chametz. I explained that blowing up a balloon would be a way to show how the yeast makes the bread rise up, like the yeast that makes one act out of control. It's not as mature. It's not as nice. Getting ready for Passover, we want to become better people.

When I and Teacher Tiqvah Terroade took out balloons, students were exuberant. "When you blow up the balloon, you are going to write on the balloon, the personality of someone who has chametz," I said. Students blew up balloons, wrote on their balloons and then 'got rid of the qualities' by pushing the balloons away. Students enjoyed this activity greatly.

On a red balloon, Brian wrote the word "Pride". On a blue balloon Anthony wrote "Frustrated". On a blue balloon Patrick wrote "anger". On a white balloon David wrote "GREED". On a green balloon Norman wrote "SIN" with "evil" underneath the word sin. Underneath the word evil, Norman wrote "stealing". On a yellow balloon Darren wrote "uncleansed".

**Thursday April 5, 2012 Lesson Plan Goal/Method/Exercise/Procedure:** To enact a model seder as preparation for the upcoming Jewish holiday of Passover with

participation from the b'nai mitzvah class. We will use ceremonial foods such as matzah, grape juice, parsley or cucumber. with salt water and boiled eggs.

**Results from the class on April 5, 2012:** Absent were Melvin and Peter. Anthony, Brian, David, Norman, teachers Tiqveh and Koro Terroade and I (Rabbi Leslie Schotz) were in attendance. I started the seder (which is a Hebrew word meaning 'order'). The order of the service called for a blessing over the grape juice. Then each student was instructed to take a piece of parsley or cucumber and dip it in the salt water symbolizing the bitterness that the Israelites encountered as slaves in Egypt. After all the greens were dipped in salt water, we said a blessing in Hebrew. The translation is: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who created the fruits of the earth. Everyone then ate the green dipped in salt water.

I proposed the following scenario which I read from *The Passover Box of Questions Game* by Melissa and Doug. "Imagine that you are working in a matzah factory and you're the new one, the new employee who's just been hired and you're asked to create a new flavor of matzah to symbolize the current struggle for the Jewish people. Think about it. What would be the flavor?"<sup>159</sup>

Norman said, "Chocolate." Anthony said, "Blueberry." Darren said, "Sour patch kids." Brian said, "Something bitter." Then we started to talk about the shapes of matzah. Norman said we could shape the matzah into the shape of Moses or into a three dimensional sphere. Darren said it could be a burning bush. When Norman suggested that we make a matzah depicting God, I explained that would be difficult since God does not

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<sup>159</sup> Melissa and Doug. *The Passover Box of Questions Game*. Westport, Conn.:Melissa & Doug LLC., 1988.

have a specific image. Norman then deferred back to a burning bush matzah. I said it would be interesting to have a burning matzah that does not actually burn.

Brian added that there could be a voice coming from the burning bush matzah.

Brian also said he was thinking of a fortune cookie type matzah that would have a fortune inside it. Then I explained that we have three matzahs and I broke the middle matzah. That one is designated as the afikomen to be hidden and found later. The students closed their eyes while the afikomen was hidden.

I asked, “What does Passover symbolize?” Norman said, “The the the, you mean the name?” When Norman is being serious he sometimes stutters when he is unsure, in contradiction to when he is giving a very confident sarcastic remark. Norman said, “What does the name mean? It is because of the Angel of Death passing over the houses...killing all the Egyptians.”

Setting the stage for how the Israelites became slaves in Egypt, I asked, “Who was in Egypt when we went there for food? Who was ruling over...Do you remember Joseph?” Norman said, “The guy who got the rainbow coat. They threw, threw him in a pit and sold him to slavery. It was really cool, really cool.” Brian added, “He was the governor.” Norman interrupted laughing, “I all most said cool, almost said cool.”

Brian emphasized again, “And then he ended up becoming the governor and told him what his dreams were.” I continued, “OK...so he was one of the twelve sons of Jacob, one of the twelve tribes. And he was a very nice leader in Egypt...and he loved us. We all moved to Egypt and unfortunately they got a new pharoah who was nothing like Joseph (who knew not Joseph) and that is how we became slaves in Egypt.” Darren said “Uh oh.”

Brian read “Let My People Go.” Then I led the class in reading “Let My People Go.” I asked, “If you had to choose someone to be the leader of the Jewish people, who would you choose?” Brian said, “Chuck Norris.” Darren said, “God.” Norman said, “God is the best choice.” I asked, “If you were Moses today, where would you tell the Jewish people to go today?” Brian said, “Israel.”

Then I expanded the question, “If you were Moses today, where would you lead the Jewish people and why?” Brian responded, “If I were Moses today, modern time, I would lead all the Jewish people to the safest parts of America instead of Israel cause I heard on the news, current events, Iran now has nuclear technology and they're planning...”

Brian was interrupted by Norman's “Uh, oh.” Darren said, “What?” Norman said, “Why didn't we stop before they had nuclear technology?” I asked Brian, “Where do you think is the safest place in the United States?” Brian said, “Depends. Farthest spot away from...” Brian was interrupted again. Norman said, “Underground”. Darren said “New Zealand.” Norman said, “China.” Anthony said, “No one will attack. It's so unimportant.” Brian said “Antarctica.” Darren said, “I would send them to Iceland.” Brian then chuckled, “I would probably lead them to Chuck Norris for protection.”

As I instructed the group's attention to the ten plagues, Norman said “Yay”. Each student was instructed to take out one drop of grape juice for each plague. I recited each plague in Hebrew, then in English. First plague: Dam in Hebrew/ Blood in English. Second plague: Tzifardaya which are Frogs. Third: Kinim which are Lice. Fourth: Arov which are Wild Beasts. Fifth: Dever which are Blights. Sixth: Shechin / Boils. Seventh: Barad/ Hail. Eighth: Harbay are Locusts. Ninth: Choshekh/ Darkness. Tenth: Makarot Habikorot: Slaying of the First Born.

I said, "Question. What do you feel are modern day plagues?" Norman said, "Cancer." Anthony said, "Nukes." I reiterated, "Nuclear." Anthony enhanced his answer, "Nuclear warfare." Brian said "Trench warfare." Norman said, "HIV and AIDS". Anthony said, "Sugar." Anthony said, "Nuclear winter. That's when you fire all the nukes at one time." Norman asked, "Can I ask a question that is not regarding Passover? Does Iran have nuclear weapons? Why didn't the U.S. try to stop Iran before they had nuclear technology?" Brian said, "We are cutting off supplies to Iran." I responded to Norman. "What you are saying is disputed. Some are saying that they do have it. Others are saying they do not. You are right. It is very worrisome." Norman asked, "Why don't they stop them before they know they have them?" I said, "That's right. That's the question. Good question."

As students were talking among themselves, I said loudly, "Dayenu which is Hebrew for 'That would have been enough.' " I then led everyone in the classic Passover Jewish song called Dayenu. Afterwards, I drew attention to the seder plate and explained all the symbols on the plate. There was tin foil on the plate to symbolize the shank bone. Norman asked if there was a real shank bone in there. I explained that this was a model seder and at an actual seder there would be a genuine shank bone. Norman laughed thinking this was very funny.

I then asked if there were any first borns. Norman is a first born and said, "Oh no, we are all going to die." Brothers Brian and Anthony pointed to their first born sister, who was taking pictures of the model seder, and they laughed as well. When Darren said, "First born sons." Brian said, "Oh, then I guess it's me."

Pointing to the matzah I said, "We are reminded that our ancestors left in such a

hurry that they did not have time to let the bread rise.” I then pointed out the maror (the bitter herbs) saying, “For Ashkenazi Jews (of Northern Europe) it is represented by the red horse radish. For the Sephardim (Spanish Jews), the romaine lettuce represents the maror and maror represents the bitterness of slavery.” Everyone read from the Haggadah, “In every generation we should regard ourselves as having been freed from slavery in Egypt.” I said that it is not just about our ancestors but about each and every one of us personally coming out of slavery in Egypt.”

More grape juice was poured to say a blessing over the second cup of grape juice. The blessing was said in Hebrew, but in English it means: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine. Then everybody drank grape juice. I explained that this is where we would perform a holy hand washing. Earlier we would have washed hands without a blessing. The second time we would say a blessing. Although water was not prepared for this, we said the blessing so that the students would learn the blessing in Hebrew. The English translation is Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe who commands us with the commandment of the lifting up of the hands.

We then said the blessing for eating bread, followed by the blessing for eating matzah, in Hebrew. Both are translated as follows: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who commands us to eat matzah. Everyone ate a piece of matzah.

Now everyone took some of the horse radish and the charoset, which is an apple nut mixture, and put them together. I led everyone in a blessing in Hebrew. The translation is Blessed are You, Lord Our God, King of the Universe, Who commands us to eat maror.

Everyone then ate the mixture. Students then prepared to make a special sandwich of matzah and maror and ate them together.

Since David's birthday is on Passover, I then led everyone in singing Happy Birthday to David in both Hebrew and English. Another cup of grape juice was poured. Then another blessing was said and then the grape juice was drunk. Then I asked if we should only have four cups of wine or grape juice or five? I asked "Have you heard of Elijah?" Norman laughed, "He comes and drinks all your wine." Then I explained that we pour a cup for Elijah. We also open a door for Elijah. Then then I led the students in singing Eliyahu Hanavi which means Elijah the Prophet.

We then said a blessing over a fourth cup of grape juice and added a blessing for being free. Brian said, "Technically not all of us are free." I added, "Right. There are still people in the world who are not free. We still have slavery in the world." Brian pointed out that we have to sing Had Gadya. Brian and Norman started singing. I said to wait. We concluded the liturgy of the Haggadah with L'shana Haba'ah Birushalayim meaning Next Year in Jerusalem. All the students sang Had Gadya, an Aramaic chorus meaning "an only goat." Students then ate some hard boiled eggs and carrots. Afterwards they searched for the afikomen. Brian found it and won a prize.

**April 19, 2012 Lesson Plan Goal:** To acknowledge Yom HaShoah, from the Hebrew meaning 'Day of the Sacrificial Burning [of People]' which has been become known in English translation as Holocaust Remembrance Day, with a formal service and to interject a sense of Spiritual Direction by making the lessons of the Holocaust spiritually relevant for today.

**Multiple Methods and Exercises:** Talk about Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Connect this day to a Spiritual Direction reference point. Participate in an actual Holocaust Remembrance Service taken from Rosenberg Holocaust Siddur available online. Write in journals.

**Results from April 19, 2012 class** Anthony, Brian, Darren, David, Melvin, Patrick, Teachers Tiqvah & Koro Terroade and I, (Rabbi Leslie Schotz) were in attendance. I asked the class, “What holiday is today?” One student answered, “Holocaust”. I said, “Yom HaShoah, day of the Shoah or Holocaust Remembrance Day.” Brian said, “There's a service about it.” I said, “Yes, we will gather in forty minutes downstairs for a service.”

“How would you describe the Holocaust?” I asked. Brian said, “Horrible; sad, depressing.” Melvin said, “Bad for everyone, not just Jews.” Then I asked, “So what was the Holocaust?” Brian said, “World War II.” I questioned Brian saying, “It was in World War II and what happened?” Brian said, “I'm not going to say the dictators name because I really hate it. He killed six million people and most of them were Jewish.”

I responded, “So my understanding was that there were six million Jews and seven million non- Jews. We say six million because we are talking about the Jews but there was even more people killed. Anybody who didn't fit into the mold they wanted was...There was a whole idea of racial purity and certain characteristics were valued more: blue eyes, blonde hair, and a supposed superior physical strength they perceived. And I don't know if you are aware that during this period of time World War II, there was an Olympic game, and an African American athlete exceeded the German athletes, which put a whole damper on their theory of physical superiority.”

Brian added, “I remember that. We read that in our classroom.” Teacher Koro



Terroade said, "Jesse Owens. He was actually friends with the man he was running against, 1936 I think. Track and field is my favorite sport." I further questioned the class saying, "Anything else you could say about the Holocaust?" After no answer I asked, "Where was God in the Holocaust?" Brian responded, "Not sure." Melvin said, "Giving us hope." Brian said, "Since God is inside all of us, I think he was with the Russians who helped." I responded, "Good answer. Very nice, so I have a story on exactly what you said."

Then I relayed the following personal account: *If you look at my Facebook page, you will see that I have a posting about remembering the six million and I added a little comment: In memory of my cousin Sam Sitko, of blessed memory. He was a Holocaust survivor and he's in the movie Paperclips(by Elliot Berlin et al.)...Unfortunately Sam died about two years ago and I learned something new which was said at the funeral. Since Sam never really talked about the Holocaust, until a group of children invited him to talk about his experience, I was able to learn what happened to my cousin in the Holocaust.*

*I don't know if you know the premise of the movie Paperclips. It takes place in Whitwell, Tennessee. I think it's a community that is all white, maybe all Christian, without any Jewish people, and I don't think there were any African Americans in the town, either. The students had a math teacher who said, 'Can you imagine the number six million? We are going to start collecting paperclips so that you understand the concept of six million.' From that, they started researching the paperclip and realized it had a significance related to the Holocaust and they immersed themselves into the project of collecting the Paperclips. They started researching it and they called upon a Holocaust group that my cousin was part of, and he went to Tennessee to talk to these kids. Then*

*there was a group of people who decided they were going to make a movie about this learning experience. The movie won all kinds of awards. Oprah showed it and it got a lot of play.*

*Then a book started to be made. A couple in Europe decided they were going to get a cattle car that had been used in the Holocaust. They had it transported to Whitwell, Tennessee. The kids could see a real cattle car there that was used to transport Jews to their death, during the Holocaust. So this is how I learned about my cousin because he never talked about it. I learned about his experiences through the movie. When these children wanted to learn, this was the first time he felt comfortable talking about it. He didn't talk about it to his own children or to his extended family of cousins either.*

*At Sam's funeral I learned more about it than I knew before relating to what you just said, Brian. My cousin Sam had been in the camps as a teenager and he had been in Auschwitz for four years. First, it was incredible that he survived this long and his sister is still living. She lives in Philadelphia. His brother, maybe two of his brothers and his parents were killed in the camps. There Sam was, you know probably skin and bones somehow surviving for four years. And the Russians liberated the camps and they lined up the Nazis and they gave a gun to my cousin, put it in his hand, and I don't know if they could understand each another with the languages they were speaking but essentially they were saying, 'All that you suffered. Kill the Nazis.' And Sam said, "I cannot take another life and he would not kill the Nazis who had been part of my cousin's personal living nightmare."*

I concluded my personal account of the story about my cousin Sam Sitko, of blessed memory, by saying this, "Brian, when you said that God was with the Russians

that resonated strongly with me and it made me think of the story which I just related to you of my dear cousin Sam Sitko, of blessed memory.

What I would like to do now is have the class take time with your journals and write something about the Holocaust, either what it means, or a drawing, where God was during the Holocaust, or any other ideas teachers?" Teacher Koro Terroade suggested writing about stories of their own relatives who were in the Holocaust.

I asked, "Does anyone here have any relative who were in the Holocaust? Are there any stories in your family? What did your parents tell you? What did your family tell you?" It didn't seem that the students had any personal reference point of stories about Holocaust survivors in their families. Teacher Koro Terroade shared that there were stories of his aunt relating to a relative about running away from countries that were known to have a connection to the Holocaust. He said it was rusty but that there was a hint of the possibility.

I asked, "What do you think is the message of the Holocaust?" Brian said, "Mourn those who passed." I said, "By the way, there's a book out, supposedly six words to summarize every Jewish experience. Someone put it on Facebook these six words summarizing the Holocaust: 'million, million, million, million, million, million' When you say six million you get used to just saying that but breaking it up and repeating a million six times makes me pause to think about the Holocaust in a more reflective and serious way."

"Do you think that anything of the Holocaust relates to today?" I asked. Students responded with these words: terrorism, terrorists, terrorists trying to kill people. Brian asked, "What about Iran and nuclear technology?" Melvin said "Like in the Holocaust

there was technology.” I asked, “So how do you think the nuclear would compare to the Holocaust?” Brian said, “Germans used guns, rifles and pistols.” Anthony said, “Guns and nukes relate to destruction.”

Expanding on what the students were saying, I said, “On one hand you are using guns and on the other you are using nukes...If the goal is destruction of people on a mass scale it's a similar thing. So how does it make you feel inside to think about this?” Brian said, “Upset.” David said “Sad because they (Jews) didn't do anything wrong.” Patrick said, “Sad.” I asked, “Do you think there are people picked on for no reason?” A few students answered yes simultaneously.

At this point I introduced an interview of a Holocaust survivor, of whom a past bar mitzvah student had interviewed for his bar mitzvah project. Brian said that he had read *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Anne Frank (Anne Frank's English language published diary was translated from the Dutch, about a Jewish girl who hides from the Nazis for two years). David said he had also read it. All the students shared details of what they knew of the story. I said, “She was always sharing hopeful messages such as believing that people are essentially good in the world. Do you think that people are good in the world?” Melvin said, “Sometimes people are mad and they pick on someone.” I asked Darren “Do you think people are essentially good or bad?” Darren said, “I think there are more good people than bad people but there are a lot of bad people so I'm not sure.”

I asked, “What makes a good person and what makes a bad person?” Darren said, “A good person doesn't pick on anyone and tries to help. A bad person does the opposite.” Brian said, “A bad person likes to curse, punch, do drugs, steal...” Melvin pointed out that technically drugs are medication. Brian added, “Cocaine, that sort of

thing.” Anthony pointed out that it is dangerous if you don't take prescriptions as prescribed and other students elaborated on abusing prescription drugs.

Patrick said that he thought there were more bad people because there are people getting picked on and there aren't people helping him. David said, “There are a lot of bad people because if there are nice people they are not showing that they are nice but bad people show they do bad things and good people don't show they are good.”

“Let's go back to the Holocaust.” I said, “There is a term 'righteous Gentiles.' Have you heard of this?” Students responded that they hadn't. I added, “Those were people like those who hid Anne Frank. They went out of their way to do the right thing.” Brian said, “Oh, to help others.” I asked about the movie that had been viewed in class last year saying, “Remember the movie *Schindler's List*? Brian remembered when Liam Neeson acted in the role of Oskar Schindler saying, “Schindler took the Jewish people into his factory and they called him a savior and his factory was like a safe place.”

I read Holocaust survivor Gloria Gantz' testimony. *German soldiers invade the country and occupy it within 3 weeks. Jews have to step off the sidewalk when a German passes by, and all people over the age of 13 have to wear an armband of the Star of David. My older brother Zelig has to wear one too. They ordered the chief Rabbi to come out of the house, they put a broom in his hand and ordered him to sweep. They took him to the marketplace and told him to put the debris in his hat. They took off his Tallit, and a soldier pierced him with the bayonet. That was the last Rabbi of my town.*<sup>160</sup>

*Wegrow was a small town of tanneries. In 1940, the Jewish population was 50% of*

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<sup>160</sup> Matthew Robert Mantione, “Gloria Gantz’ August 19, 2009 Testimony,” *Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, Glen Cover, New York* (Bar Mitzvah Project for the Jewish Center of Bay Shore: October 18, 2009), 2.

*the town. By 1944 the percentage was zero. My father, Mendlel Przepiorka was one of 10 children born to my grandparents, Pinchas and Rachel. You can imagine how many aunts and cousins and uncles I had. My mother was a teacher by training. She had a beautiful voice and sang me lullabies every night. I begged her to sing all the time. I played hide-and-seek with my brothers and because I was the smallest one, I was able to fit under the bed. Our home, as it turns out, was very convenient for the Nazis. It was only about 14 miles from Treblinka. At Auschwitz you were able to work, but at Treblinka you went in as a person and came out as ashes.<sup>161</sup>*

*So hiding ceased being a game and became a method of survival. One cold dark night when I was three, I went for a walk with my mother. It was freezing cold and I had to dress very warm. The winters in Poland were much colder than the coldest day here. My mother carried a small cardboard suitcase for me. We stopped at a little farmhouse and an unfamiliar woman opened the door. My mother said to me, 'you have to stay here little Gittela' and I said 'you too, mama?' She shook her head and walked out. I cried and screamed. This strange woman gave me a hot drink and told me that I had to be a big girl. The next morning I woke up with swollen eyes and asked her if I had become a big girl yet. I became a big girl quickly because that was the last time I saw my mother.<sup>162</sup>*

*The woman's name was Matka, which is what I called her after a while. Matka is Polish for mother. There were days filled with tears, loneliness, despair. I missed my mother, father, and my brothers. As the seasons passed, the memories of my family began to fade. The gentleness and lovingness of this woman helped me to get through those dark*

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

*days. Unlike other people of that time, I had no material deprivation. I always had food, a warm bed, and I always had clothes to wear. My name became Gucha; not Gittel, and that was one of what became many first names on my journey.*<sup>163</sup>

*One day I asked for a glass of milk with my kielbasa sandwich and my Matka told me I couldn't have milk because I was Jewish.*<sup>164</sup>

I pointed out the Children's Memorial Garden of the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center. I said, "It's a testament to the memory of the one and one-half million Jewish children who perished at the hands of the Nazis, along with all non-Jewish children who were also killed... And they plant plants that will attract butterflies, a symbol of the child victims of the Holocaust. Matthew ended up working in that. Not only did he interview the survivor but he also worked in this garden."<sup>165</sup>

Next I read: "WE REMEMBER THE CHILDREN; THE LONG ISLAND HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY 2009."<sup>166</sup>

I asked, "Does anyone have any questions about the Holocaust or God in the Holocaust?" Then I asked, "What does the word tolerance mean?" Darren answered, "Having patience with people." I asked, "Do you think the idea of bullying is connected to the Holocaust?" Brian said, "Yes, yes it is and no one is doing anything about it." I asked, "Do you think that this idea of hate and discrimination is just towards Jews or are other people discriminated against?" Melvin said, "Other people." I asked, "Who?" Anthony said, "Anyone."

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 9.

“So how do you think it's possible to heal after the Holocaust?” I asked, “How is it possible to find peace?” Brian said, “Move on.” Anthony said, “Pray.” I asked, “What do you do when you're praying?” Melvin answered, “Talking to God.” I didn't hear the following responses until I listened back to the tape. One student said, “Tebowing.” Another student said, “Tebow.”

At this point I told everyone to take out their journals. During the service the students were instructed to write down one thing that they thought was important or seemed worth putting in their journal. These are the responses. David wrote, “Praying means talking to god and asking him for help.” On one page Darren wrote, “never forget never easily trust just because you think he can change your life.” On another page Darren wrote, “It is very sad that all those people had to die because of their nationality.”

Melvin wrote, “a lot of people died”. Anthony wrote, “Many people died during the Holocaust. G-D was probably in everyone's mind.” Anthony also drew a picture of a stick figure with hair on head, eyes and a smiling mouth. Drawn inside the person's head is a circle with the word G-D inside. Underneath this drawing and words, a line is drawn. Under the line are the following bullet points: “important, sad, remembering.” Underneath the bullet points, Anthony wrote, “This is a very important service to remember those who were in the Holocaust.” Patrick wrote, “6 million Jews killed for know reason.” Brian wrote, “The holocaust was a horrible, sad, evil, depressing thing during WW II 6 million jewish people killed and many more.”

The students processed downstairs to the sanctuary where I led a Holocaust service as follows: “Shalom everyone. It is important that you're here for Yom Ha Shoah, for a Yom Ha Shoah service on the actual day of Yom Ha Shoah which began last night and



continues until today; tonight.”[The service I read from was taken from *The Rosenberg Holocaust Siddur* in PDF form available for free download and copying.]

In *The Rosenberg Holocaust Siddur*, we started the service “From Silence.”

*We begin our service in the remembrance of the Holocaust in silence. Let us surround our worship, our community in prayer, with silence in preparation for the presence of God. Silence does not just bring to a standstill words and noise. Silence is more than the temporary renunciation of speech. It is a door opening before prayer, toward the very realms of the spirit and the heart. Silence is the beginning of a reckoning of the soul, the prelude to an account of the past and the consideration of the present, may our shared silence lead us to awareness of a time of total evil that degraded out most precious values, the very meaning of religious existence, and life itself.*

*Our silence is to be a committed accounting for other silences that accepted persecutions and were indifferent to debasement and crime. There was a time when silence was a crime. We think particularly of one night of silence, over half a century ago: Kristallnacht, the night of the broken glass, the 9th of November, 1938. Then, all the synagogues in Germany rose up in flame and smoke to the skies. The churches next to them stood in darkness, and in silence.*

*Glass littered the streets-the broken shop-windows of the Jewish community. The neighbors walked upon the crunching splinters and were silent. A few prayed. Some churches courageously expressed their grief. But a dark cloud of silence filled the world. When will that silence end? When will we speak out on behalf of suffering neighbors? Not until we affirm God together, not until we acknowledge that we are*

*all God's children. From the silence of uncaring, let us move on to the silence, which is the search for God, the search for ourselves. Then we can move beyond that silence and affirm the One God, we can proclaim God's name to the world.*<sup>167</sup>

“And at this time we do take a moment for silent reflection on the Holocaust.” I said and then sang from *The Rosenberg Holocaust Siddur*, “Walk to Caesaria”<sup>168</sup> [Text is by Hannah Szenesh and music by David Zehavi, arranged by Bonia Shur.] *Eili, eili, she-lo yi-ga-mer l'olam. Ha-chol v'-ha-yam, rish-rush shel ha-ma-yim B'-rak ha-sha-ma-yim, t'-fi-lat ha-a-dam* [which translates to] My God, my God, I pray that these things never end: The sand and the sea, the rush of the water, the crash of the heavens; the prayer of the heart.

I called upon a reader to continue to read the following from *The Rosenberg Holocaust Siddur*. *We commune today, Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day, we commune with the memory: -of the six million members of our nation who perished as tormented martyrs at the hand of the Nazis and their helpers; of the communities and families of the House of Jacob that were destroyed and obliterated in a malevolent scheme to eradicate the name and civilization; of Israel from under heaven. We remember with respectful awe:-the fortitude of our brethren who gave their lives for their people in sanctity and purity; the sublime valor of those quarantined in the ghettos and of the fighters who rose and kindled the flame of rebellion to redeem their people's honor; the lofty relentless struggle of*

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<sup>167</sup> Dr Bernard Rosenberg, *Rosenberg Holocaust Siddur*.  
<http://www.jewishfreeware.org/downloads/YOM%20HASHOAH/FinalMASTER%203-7-%20ROSENBERGHOLOCAUST.pdf> (accessed 19 April 2012).

<sup>168</sup> Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, Hannah Szenesh, “Walk to Caesaria,” (Music by David Zehavi, arranged by Bonia Shur), 37.

*the Jewish masses for their humanity and their Jewish civilization; and the righteous among the nations, who saved Jews at the risk of their own lives.*<sup>169</sup>

I continued reading a responsive reading, saying, “I’ll read one line. Please respond with the next.” *We have come here to remember those who cannot be forgotten. We have come to speak of that which cannot be spoken but must not be left unsaid. We have come to remind not others but ourselves of what was done and what was not done. We have come to ask questions that cannot be answered but cannot be left unasked. We know how to remember the dead we have known. We know how to commemorate the death of one person. But all of us are mourners; all of us recall not one but six million ones. Not only those we have known, but those no one can know, the names that are forever lost.*<sup>170</sup>

I asked Teacher Tiqvah Terroade to read the following, “When They Came For Me” *First they came for the communists; And I did not speak out...Because I was not a communist; Then they came for the socialists; And I did not speak out...Because I was not a socialist; Then they came for the trade unionists; And I did not speak out...Because I was not a trade unionist; Then they came for the Jews; And I did not speak out...Because I was not a Jew; Then they came for me...And there was no one to speak out for me. Pastor Martin Niemoeller*<sup>171</sup>

I then asked Brian to read, *It’s difficult in times like these: ideals, dreams, and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It’s a wonder I haven’t abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at*

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<sup>169</sup>Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 79.

<sup>170</sup> Reuven Hammer, “Megilat HaShoah,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*.

<sup>171</sup> Pastor Martin Niemoeller, “When They Came For Me,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 67.

*heart. It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions, and yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold onto my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realize them!* by Anne Frank.<sup>172</sup>

I asked everyone to read together “Inscription of Hope” *I believe in the sun, even when it's not shining, and I believe in love even when there's no one there. I believe in God even when he is silent, I believe in any trial there is always a way. But sometimes in this suffering and hopeless despair, my heart cries out for shelter to know someone's there. But a voice rises within me saying hold on my child, I'll give you strength, I'll give you hope. Just stay a little while. May there some day be sunshine, May there some day be happiness, May there some day be love, May there some day be peace.*<sup>173</sup>

A reader continued on the same page with: “An Affirmation for the Future” *I pray for courage, and for strength. When I remember the evils in the past, The innocent people tortured and murdered, I am almost afraid to make myself remember. But I am even more afraid to forget. I ask for wisdom, that I might mourn, And not be consumed by hatred. That I might remember, And yet not lose hope. I must face evil—And, so doing, reaffirm my faith in future good. I cannot*

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<sup>172</sup> Anne Frank, “Excerpts from Diary of a Young Girl,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 68.

<sup>173</sup> “Inscription of Hope,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 70.

*erase yesterday's pains, But I can vow that they will not have suffered in vain. And so I pray: For those who were given death, I choose life—For me and for generations yet to come. For those who found courage to stand against evil—Often at the cost of their lives—I vow to carry on their struggle. I must teach myself, and others to learn from hate that people must love, to learn from evil to live for good.*<sup>174</sup>

I continued with the following: *The human race dreamed a dream, and six million of our people were among those who did not wake up when the mad dream was over. The human race dreamed a dream, not only of death, but also of indifference, when one person's fate mattered not to his fellow-person. It was a nightmare in which few indeed raised their voices to oppose, to protest, to rebel, to save lives. But we recall those who did, those who placed their own lives in danger in order to protect human life. In our recollections we recall the Righteous Among the Nations, those who demonstrated their humanity in the face of danger, even when an act of humanity was a crime. And a spark of life is rekindled in our spirit, a candle of faith in humanity--and hence also in God—after the long night winds which had extinguished all faith." And if one preserves a single human life, Scripture considers it as though that person has saved an entire world.*"<sup>175</sup>

I continued with candle lighting saying “We have six candles up here. Each candle represents one million Jews.” The six candles were yellow in color in little yahrzeit [ a word that means ‘anniversary of death’] glasses provided by the Men's Club of the Jewish Centre of Bay Shore which they secured from the Conservative Jewish

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<sup>174</sup> “An Affirmation for the Future,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 70.

<sup>175</sup> Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 102.

organization called Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs.

I asked the bar mitzvah class to come to the bimah and then I read the following:

*Six million died! [That is] more than one third of the Jewish population of the world. The whole world stood by silent: In 1942, the country that regarded itself as the most civilized nation in the world, Germany, - "Die Kulturtraeger!" Germany; the center of culture, was responsible for the death of six million Jews. Among them were young innocent children, the aged, sick, defenseless and helpless people. Six million died. We must not forget them. Their death shall not be in vain. This shall never happen again. In our tradition we light a Yahrzeit candle for the death of our loved ones. Let us light six candles, one for each million.*<sup>176</sup>

I lit a candle and had the bar mitzvah class pass around the candle so that each one of them would hold the candle. Simultaneously I read the following: *First Candle: In memory of helpless infants, children and teenagers who were cut down like young trees before their time...before they had a chance to experience life. We shall not forget!*<sup>177</sup>

The bar mitzvah class was then seated as I read the following: *Second Candle: In memory of all mothers who died with their children in their arms. We shall not forget! Third Candle: In memory of all mothers and fathers who were cruelly separated from their families, We shall not forget! Fourth Candle: In memory of all scholars, teachers, who were the first to be seized. We shall not forget! Fifth Candle: In memory of the "Heroes of the Resistance", who fought the Nazis - so few against so many. We shall not forget! Sixth Candle: In memory of the martyrs, who*

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<sup>176</sup> Community Foundation for Jewish Education, "Remember! Commemorating the Shoah," (Chicago, Board of Jewish Education), Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 104.

<sup>177</sup> Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 104.

*gave their lives to help their brothers under the Nazis. We shall not forget!*<sup>178</sup>

Everyone rose as I sung the following prayer from *The Rosenberg Holocaust Siddur*

“El Malei Rachamim” *IN MEMORY OF THE SIX MILLION: El malei rahamim shokhen ba-m'romim, hamtzei m'nuhah n'khonah tahat kanfei ha-sh'khinah b'ma'alot k'doshim ut-horim k'zohar ha-rakiah maz'hirim, et nishmot kol aheinu b'nei Yisrael, anashim nashim v'taf, she-nitb'bhv v'shenehenku v'shenisrafu v'shenehergu, b'gan eden t'hei m'nuhatam. Ana ba'al ha-rahamim, has-tirem b'seter k'nafekha l'olamim utzror bitzror ha-hayim et nishmotehem. Adonai hu nahalatam. V'yanuhu v'shalom al mish'kvotehem. V' nomar amen.* Exalted, compassionate God, grant perfect peace in Your sheltering Presence among the holy and the pure, to the souls of all our brethren, men, women, and children of the House of Israel who were slaughtered and suffocated and burned to ashes. May their memory endure, inspiring truth and loyalty in our lives. May their souls thus be bound up in the bond of life. May they rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.<sup>179</sup>

I continued, “We remember the six million Jews and five million others as we recite the Kaddish.” Then I read “We Remember”, *We remember the six million Jews and five million others by reciting the Kaddish, the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead. This prayer is not a funeral hymn but an affirmation of God's everlasting Presence and dominion, praising God's existence and creative love. It is in this spirit that we pray the Kaddish, remembering the victims of the Holocaust.*<sup>180</sup>

*We also pray for the survivors, (so few left in the world today) whose faith in life*

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 90.

<sup>180</sup> “We Remember,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 45.

*enabled them to rebuild in other countries their shattered lives, their destroyed worlds. Joining together they brought about new life, they raised new families in new lands, in defiance of absolute terror and despair, an invincible hope. Exalted by that spirit of life-giving and faith, we pray today.*<sup>181</sup>

I pointed out that the time for living Holocaust survivors is limited. I said, “Before we continue, I want to point out that everyone who is here today is living in a time that maybe in fifteen or twenty years will not be the same time, because the survivors who survived the Holocaust may no longer be around. My cousin was in his eighties (when he died) and he was a teenager (in the Holocaust). In twenty years from now all those teenagers who survived would be theoretically a hundred years old. In a few decades there will no longer be any Holocaust survivors, so it's so important to remember this story of the Holocaust.”

We continued with the Mourner's Kaddish, which is a prayer said by mourners to honor the memory of their loved ones. The Hebrew word Kaddish is related to the word Kadosh which means holy. The italicized words use English letters to transliterate the Hebrew. Someone who is not able to read Hebrew can still join along by sounding out the way the words sound in Hebrew using English characters.

“Mourner’s Kaddish” - *Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'meih raba. B'al'ma di v'ra chiruteih, v'yamlich malchuteihb'chayeichon uv'yomeichon uv'chayei d'chol beit yisra-eil, ba-agala uvizman kariv,v' imru amein. Unison: Y'hei sh'meih raba m'varach l'alam ul'al'mei al'maya. Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpa-ar v'yitromam v'yitnasei v'yithadar v'yitaleh v'yithalal sh'meih d'kudsha b'rich hu, l'eila min kol birchata v'shirata*

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.



*tushb'chata v'nechemata, da-amiran b'al'ma, v'imru amein. Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya, v'chayim aleinu v'al kol yisra-eil, v'imru amein. Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya-aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol yisra-eil, v'imru amein.*<sup>182</sup>

Then we continued with a special Holocaust Kaddish, which includes the traditional Prayer for the Dead known as the Mourner's Kaddish, interspersed with the names of ghettos, concentration camps and massacres of Germany and Europe. In **bold face letters** is the standard Mourner's Kaddish, which is in the Aramaic language that is closely related to the Hebrew language. In *italics* are included the names of the concentration camps where Nazis gruesomely liquidated their human inhabitants.

**“THE HOLOCAUST KADDISH” - Yit-gadal** *Auschwitz-Birkenau-Buna, Balanowka, Belsen* **Ve-yit-kadash** *Belzec, Bialystok, Babi Yar* **Shmei Raba** *Bochini, Bogdanovka, Buchenwald* **B'alma divra chir-utei** *Chelmno, Kracow, Dachau* **V'yamlich mal-chutei** *Dakovo, Danica, Dora* **Be-chayei-chon uv'yomei-chon** *Dumanovka, Ebensee, Edineti, Flossenburg* **U'vchayei de chol beit Yisrael** *Gross Rosen, Gunzkirchen, Gurs* **Ba-agalau-vizman kariv** *Herzogenbusc, Iasi, Jadovno, Kaiserwald* **V'imru Amen. Ye-hei shmei raba m'vorach l'olam** **ul'olmei alma-ya Yitbarach ve-yishtabach** *Kamanetz-Podolsk, Kishniev, Kovno, Klooga* **Ve-yitpa-ar ve-yitromam** *Lodz, Lubin, Lublin, Lvov, Lyons* **Ve-yit-nasei ve-yit-hadar** *Majdanek, Mauthausen, Minsk, Natzweiler, Neuengamme* **Ve-yit-aleh ve-yit-halal** *Ohrdruf, Plashov, Papenburg, Ponary* **Shmei d'kudesha b'rich Hu** *Prague, Radom, Ravensbruck, Rehmsdorf, Riga* **L'eila** *Sachensburg, Sachsenhausen, San Sabba, Shauliai* **Min kol birchata v'shirata** *Skarzysko*

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<sup>182</sup> “Resource: Appendix II – Readings, Poetry, Essays,” Rosenberg , *Holocaust Siddur*, 30.

*Kameinna, Sobibar Stutthof Tush-bechata ve-neche-mata Theresienstadt, Transnistria, Treblinka, Vilna Da-amiran b'alma Viavara, Warsaw, Zemun, Zhitomir, and the scores of other camps. V'imru Amen. Yehei shlama raba min shmaya Ve-chayim aleinu V'al Kol Yisrael V'imru Amen.*<sup>183</sup>

“The following was written by the children in a concentration camp in Terezin and the children were ages ten to sixteen years old in 1944. Please join me.” I said and continued with an anonymous composition written in 1944 by children ages 10 – 16 years old in Concentration Camp Terezin Barracks L318 and 1417 “On a Sunny Evening”

*On a purple, sun shot evening - Under wide-flowering chestnut trees - Upon the threshold full of dust yesterday, today, days are all like these. Trees flower forth in beauty, lovely, too, their very wood, all gnarled and old - That I am half afraid to peer - Into their crowns of green and gold. The sun has made a veil of gold - So lovely that my body aches. Above, the heavens shriek with blue - Convinced I've smiled by some mistake. The world's abloom and seems to smile. I want to fly but where, how high? If in barbed wire, things can bloom - Why couldn't I? I will not die!*<sup>184</sup>

I said, “We now rise again for the Israeli national anthem and then we'll sing *The Star Spangled Banner*.” HaTikvah -Kol od baleivav p'nima, Nefesh y'hudi homiya, Ul-fatei mizrach kadima, Ayin l'tziyon tzofiyah, Od lo av'da tikvateinu, Hatikvah bat sh'not alpayim, Lih-yot am chofshi b'artzeinu, Eretz Tziyon Virushalayim.

The translation is as follows: “*The Hope*” As long as deep within the heart, A

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<sup>183</sup> “Evening Service,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 30.

<sup>184</sup> Anonymous children ages 10 – 16 years old in Concentration Camp Terezin Barracks L318 and 1417, “On a Sunny Evening,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 53.

*Jewish soul stirs, And forward, to the ends of the East, An eye looks out, towards Zion.  
Our hope is not yet lost, The hope of two thousand years, To be a free people in our land,  
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.*<sup>185</sup>

“And now for ‘*The Star Spangled Banner*’.” I said as I pointed to two flags saying,  
“We have two flags” I first pointed to the Israeli flag and then pointed to the American  
flag.” We then sang

“*The Star Spangled Banner*” from *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* as  
follows: *O say can you see by the dawn's early light, What so proudly we hailed at  
the twilight's last gleaming, Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the  
perilous fight, O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming? And the  
rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night that our  
flag was still there; O! Say does that star-spangled banner yet wave, O'er the land  
of the free and the home of the brave?*<sup>186</sup>

Then I said, “Please be seated for one last benediction.” I read, *O Lord our God,  
help us pray, as our ceremony ends that our service might begin. And keep us from  
forgetting the difference. Keep us from feeling too good about what we say and do  
today, for words are not enough, and it is far too easy to recall gigantic evil done  
by others, yet miss the link to seeds of future horror in our own lives: in apathy, in  
the careless racial slur, in blindness to a neighbor's wound, or deafness to his  
cry....And yet, let us take some pride--and hope--in what we do today, for  
sometimes, words can pave the way: songs and prayers can bear witness to the*

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<sup>185</sup> “Appendix II – Readings, Poetry, Essays,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 75.

<sup>186</sup> “The Star Spangled Banner,” *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, 395.

*good within us still, can give dreams a voice--a call which might be, must be, heard, to give direction to our lives. So, from the Holocaust, we learn: when we deny humanity in others, we destroy humanity within ourselves. When we reject the human, and the holy, in any neighbor's soul, then we unleash the beast, and the barbaric, in our own heart. And, since the Holocaust, we pray: if the time has not yet dawned when we can all proclaim our faith in God, then let us say at least that we admit we are not gods ourselves. If we cannot yet see the face of God in others, then let us see, at least, a face as human as our own.*<sup>187</sup>

In conclusion I said the following, “Thank you to those who spoke up that we should have a Holocaust service which is certainly near and dear to me since I have Holocaust survivors in my family. Thank you to the community, our Education Chairs, Sisterhood, our teachers, the whole congregation, the parents and students for being part of such an important remembrance ceremony on Yom Hashoah. Thank you everyone for being here.”

At this point the b’nai mitzvah class processed to the Holocaust Scroll in the lobby. I said that the Torah scroll there had been saved from Kolin, Czechoslovakia, elaborating with the following information: “It was written at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It's one of fifteen hundred sixty four scrolls the Nazis gathered in Czechoslovakia or Prague in World War II. They were trying to show that this is a defunct culture, the culture no longer exists, which is not true.”

The b’nai mitzvah students returned to the classroom. I asked, “Did you feel the presence of God was at the service?” When there was no answer, I asked, “What is

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<sup>187</sup>Chaplain Arnold R. Resnicoff, U.S. Navy, “Benediction,” Rosenberg, *Holocaust Siddur*, 77.

something from the service you thought is worth mentioning?” Brian answered, “The concentration camps because I could compare it to the story of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. At one point she had said, 'In spite of everything I believe that people are good.' That is a quote in reality, in her diary. I remember that her father said she was at Auschwitz. Her father asked about Anne from someone who had survived.”

Melvin said, “I think it was necessary to light six candles.” I asked, “What did you think about lighting six candles?” Melvin said, “It was a good way to remember all the six million.” I asked, “Is there something about lighting and candles that can connect you to the idea of a soul? What is a soul? Can you describe a soul?” Anthony answered, “Something that makes you live or something that people can't see.” Brian added, “A living force inside you...your spirit.” I asked Patrick. He said, “Something inside of you.” I asked David. He said, “Feelings”. Brian said, “I think it's the energy of our being.”

At this point I transferred the focus of the class. I said that I was impressed by the class when they blew up balloons and talked about spiritual chametz. I explained that we are now in a period of counting the omer which started on the second night of Passover leading up to the giving of the Torah on Shavuot. “This is an opportunity for us to better ourselves,” I said. Then I compared getting rid of chametz to the balloon exercise of getting rid of negative things and said, “We will talk more about it next week.”

Since next week's lesson will focus on Israel Independence Day, Teacher Tiqvah Terroade suggested that the students get a head start with a special activity. Teacher Koro Terroade had found a rope made of the same blue and white colors of the Israeli national flag. Since the word Israel is often translated as 'one who struggles with God', this seemed like a fun activity to bring the message home. Then I mentioned the idea of a

good inclination and a bad inclination and how they can pull at you. Brian pointed out the good angel and the bad angel. I said, “There's an idea that if you make Shabbat, the good angel says, 'Yeah, may it be like this next week.' And if you don't make Shabbat the bad angel says, 'Great, let's make it like this next week.'” Anthony asked, “What if the good angel and the bad angel agree...?” I said, “Sometimes it's a struggle to do right. Your teachers have found rope, so next week you get to really struggle in a tug of war.” Melvin asked, “Can we do it now?” I said, “No, we don't have enough time.”

I spoke about the counting of the omer and Teacher Tiqvah took out the rope and explained how Teacher Koro Terroade had found this beautiful blue and white rope in Home Depot. Patrick then spoke up “Can we just try it?” Since Patrick is usually quiet and must be prompted to speak, I acknowledged his initiative by saying, “Patrick, we are doing this because you spoke up.” The students went ahead with a tug of war using the blue and white rope for a very short while.

**Thursday April 26, 2012 Lesson Plan Goal:** Talk about Israeli Independence Day, explore God's Presence and summarize the last ten weeks of Jewish Spiritual Direction.

**Methods/Exercises/Procedure:** Encourage conversation and practice Meditation, Movement and Music.

**Results from Thursday April 26, 2012:** Anthony, Brian, Darren, David, Melvin, Patrick, Teachers Tiqvah and Koro Terroade and I, Rabbi Leslie Schotz were in attendance. I said, “Today is the last time I am formally going to be in the class. It's been ten times already. Thank you for allowing me to be here with the support of your teachers. I am looking forward to gaining a perspective on my time here. Maybe you will be able to give me your thoughts as to what you thought happened. Can you think of

anything that you learned that was different from what you thought before?”

I continued asking if they had heard about Jewish Yoga before? They answered no. I asked if they knew about Jewish Meditation before. Anthony said that all religions had some form of meditation. I asked, “What about God's Presence; Jewish Spiritual Direction; thinking about how God is in your life? I really learned a lot of good things from all of you. I will be thinking about all that I learned from you and I will be writing about it including the music, the exercises and your ideas. Spiritual Direction can be talking about things, but it doesn't always have to be about talk. It can be about moving singing, or creating.”

“Do you know what holiday it is today?” I asked. Brian answered, “Israel Independence Day.” I said, “In Hebrew it is called Yom Ha'atzma'ut. Today in synagogue we said some special prayers, recognized it as a holiday and I just wanted to acknowledge that.” I continued to talk about what the holiday means including how long the state of Israel has existed, developing Hebrew as a spoken language, the biblical background of Israel and the inclusion of Israel in our prayers.

I spoke of how I met the grandson of namesake Eliezer Ben Yehuda, whose grandfather was deeply involved with reviving the language of Hebrew in Israel. Grandfather Eliezer Ben Yehuda came up with a Hebrew dictionary because he was so passionate about wanting to keep the Hebrew language alive as a living language. Grandson Ben Yehuda also stayed in the field of language with his own language learning program called *Rosetta Stone*<sup>188</sup>. [I had met Eliezer Ben Yehuda in 2000 at Hofstra College, located in Hempstead, Long Island, New York. He was a conference

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<sup>188</sup> Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Rosetta Stone*. <http://www.benyehuda.us> (accessed 12 December 2012).

vendor at a CAJE convention held there. CAJE was an acronym for the Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education. The name was then changed to the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education. CAJE had been the primary professional development organization for congregational and Hebrew school teachers. It closed in 2009 after thirty years saying it couldn't survive in the current economic climate.]

“What do you know about Israel?” I asked the students. Brian said, “Beating a bunch of other countries that are still at war. They're trading with Jordan I think. Now they have to worry about Iran.” I said, “A teeny tiny country in the midst of the Middle East, next to Africa, a very strong military, mussad...Before Israel was formed in 1948, there were Jews living there and it was known by another name, Palestine. They were called Palestineans. Palestine is Israel, but it's not a name the Jews called it. It was a name given by a conquering nation. Jews reclaimed an original name, Tzion, Zion, Israel.”

“We are now counting the omer leading up to what holiday?” I asked. Brian answered, “Shavuot.” I asked, “What is Shavuot, the giving of the...” A student said trees. I said, “The answer is the torah which is a tree of life to those who hold it near.” I continued, “Some of you are getting ready for a big day. Others have already had this, the bar mitzvah.” I knew that David's bar mitzvah was approaching on the Shabbat of May 5th, so I wanted to create a light hearted atmosphere in an attempt to make David feel more relaxed about his upcoming simchah (happy day).

At this point I read *Alfie's Bark Mitzvah* by Shari Cohen. Melvin shared that his dog had died around Valentine's Day. I asked Melvin if he was ok about reading this book. He said, “I'll be strong.” I asked, “Is this book too silly to read?” Brian said, “You should



read it, no matter how silly.” The students greatly enjoyed pointing out the types of dogs depicted in the book including a mastif and a greyhound. Also, one student asked what the hora was and then I explained that it was a Jewish dance commonly danced at Jewish celebrations.

I asked, “What do you think would be a good way of connecting with God?” Brian said, “Sleeping.” Anthony added, “Take a nap.” Melvin said, “That's a perfect plan.” Anthony said, “You could dream of him or her.” This was the level of response and finally Anthony' argument won me over.

“Ahh,” I said continuing, “Let's all take a moment to close our eyes. I'm going to sing Shalom and this will be a time to just relax. This is a good thing to do if you're ever in a tense moment.” I proceeded to chant/sing “Shalom” a number of times and encouraged relaxation. Anthony requested that the lights be turned off. It was precisely at this moment that I felt an ‘Aha!’ moment.

How wonderful that the students, teachers and me could all be together in silence. I could have concluded that the students were being silly and disrespectful by saying sleeping is a way to connect with God. Instead it became a powerful teaching moment for us on the art of being silent and contemplative. I said, “Let's take this opportunity to be calm and quiet and to just connect to...stillness.”

There was a little giggling and cross talk. I took this opportunity to sing Psalm 133:1 *Hineh Ma Tov* translated as *Behold How Good* in English. In Hebrew it continues “shevet achim gam yachad” meaning “for brothers to dwell together.” Teacher Koro Terroade joined in.

Maintaining the friendly but serious atmosphere created I said, “In these last ten

weeks you've been working so hard....or hardly working and that's ok because sometimes the most important thing is just showing up. Our job is to try and make our time on earth a better place, to do good deeds, to do mitzvot, be good people in the world, to be thankful for food, clothing and shelter and friends. In Psalm 100 it says 'Ivdu et Adonai b'simcha.' 'Serve God with happiness.' It is good to hear happiness here.” I was referring to earlier giggling in the silence.

As I was giving a focal point for contemplation, I realized that this ‘time for sleeping’ was more of a meditative state for receiving my words. As I continued to reflect on what had occurred, I realized that it was as if I was giving a sermon, which could be received in a fully present state, for this group of teenage boys. The boys were tired. They wanted to relax. There are times during the day we all probably long to sleep or to just relax free of the next task on the agenda. I could strongly identify with the longing for rest that the boys had voiced.

The sound of an electronic device could be heard in the silence. Anthony yelled, “You messed up my meditation!” Brian said, “Was that my phone?” Another student said, “Can I have a moment of silence?” I was thrilled to hear the students using a vocabulary that employed meditative language in their speech! Even if they were being light hearted, I believed that the message of contemplation was being heard and internalized on teenage terms, which could be referenced in their psyche for later use. I believe the students were in the process of expanding upon a personal spiritual tool box.

As the students were communicating with one another, one student called the other a retard. I pointed out that this was inappropriate language. The student apologized. I had recently seen a print campaign against using the term “retard”. This now became a

consciousness raising point and I explained that the term was condescending and should not be repeated, no matter who started using this language

Changing the subject, I asked how the student's day was in public school. The students shared that they were feeling stressed about a week of testing. I asked, "If you were to have a test about how to be a good person, what are things you would want to get rid of and things you would want to gain as a good person?"

Melvin said, "I want to be good in school. That's what I want." I asked, "Pressure?" Melvin said, "Yes, science pressure." I asked, "How much time do you put in doing homework?" Melvin said, "Two or three hours." I pointed out that in the past Melvin had shared that if mom is not around it becomes a dilemma as to whether or not to do homework. Melvin said, "Yes. I remember that."

I said, "So now we have the tests and they don't take into account whether you had fun with your games. What they do measure is whatever you have learned from all the homework that you did on a daily basis." Melvin said, "I don't like homework though." Students laughed with understanding. The quiet space was now transitioning to a more energetic atmosphere. I said, "Now that we have had rest. It's time to wake up."

We now moved to a more open space for stretching. One of the students started chanting, "Yoga Yoga Yoga." I instructed the students now to think of a way to connect to God with our bodies, not with words. We went around in a circle as each person expressed him or herself with physical movement. I said, "One, two, three. Do something." Everyone including the student, the teachers and me moved into a fixed position one by one expressing our unique connection to God.

"As we said earlier," I said, "It's Israel Independence Day. I see a Shalom sign over

there. It's blue and white. Let's make believe it's the Israeli flag," I continued, "Let's face east and we will sing the Israeli national anthem Hatikvah meaning the Hope." [There is a Jewish tradition to face east towards Jerusalem when reciting Hebrew prayers.] Everyone sang Hatikvah in Hebrew as prepared by Teacher Tiqvah Terroade as follows: *Kol od ba'levav penima, Nefesh yehudi homia, Ul'fatei mizrach kadima, Ayin tetziyon tzofia, Od lo av'da tikvateinu, Hatikva sh'not apayim, Lihiyot am hofshi be'artzeinu, Eretz tziyon vi'rushalayim, Lihiyot am hofshi be'artzeinu, Eretz tziyon vi'rushalayim.*

I asked, "What would be a good translation for the words to that song? I will tell you what the translation is afterwards, but if you were to make up your own translation, what would it be? What should the Israeli national anthem say and mean? What words would you put into a song about Israel?" Brian said, "Small, wide, dry." Anthony said, "Inspirational." Darren said, "Holy." Melvin said, "Water." Brian said, "Strong." One student said, "Independence." Another said, "Defendable." I read the translation submitted by Teacher Tiqvah Terroade as follows: *As long as deep in the heart, The soul of a Jew yearns, And forward to the East, To Zion, An eye looks, Our hope will not be lost, The hope of two thousand years, To be a free nation in our land, The land of Zion and Jerusalem.*

At this point I pointed out the Jewish Yoga Hebrew alphabet of poses shown on a poster. Each student was encouraged to choose a letter for the group to pose to. Someone called out the Hebrew letter vav. I said "David can show you how to do a vav." Everyone looked at David. I pointed out that the translation of the Hebrew vav is "and" in English. I said, "It's a connecting kind of word." I had everyone pose for a picture. I said, "As you are posing for the camera, think 'and' and what will the future be?"

Melvin knelt down and said that he was doing a “Tebow” referring to the football player who prayed openly on the sports field. I said, “Everyone, do a Tebow.” Most of the students knelt in the same position. Darren voiced that it was humiliating and embarrassing to do that. I asked why. Darren said that it was weird. Melvin argued that if a professional football player can do it, he can too. Darren still said that he felt it was weird. I asked, “If Tebow was Jewish, what do you think that he would be praying about?” Melvin said, “Winning his football game.” I added, “Then it doesn't matter if he is Jewish or not, it's the same thought.”

I asked for more Hebrew letters. Brian chose the mem. He wanted to choose what he thought was the hardest letter (to move the body into position.) Darren chose the Hebrew letter koof which was hard to balance to. Brian said, “Pretend you are kung fu.” Another student said, “Om.” I encouraged everyone to hold the position of their chosen letters simultaneously. Photographs were taken of the group exercise.

Students had fun posing in Hebrew letters for photographs taken by me on my cell phone. I heard some moaning in regards to position. Since I had once been a fitness instructor, I showed the students how to move only in a comfortable manner and not to strain themselves. I emphasized stretching and not over doing it. The key is daily practice and working one's way up to comfortable movement. The next letter everyone moved to was the Hebrew letter resh. I pointed out that our lives are about balancing: sleeping, resting, moving.

Journals were handed out so that the students would have one last time to answer a questionnaire filled out a few times before. This time, instead of handing out the questionnaire, I recited the questions and asked students to write their answers in their

journals. As I asked each question, I observed and encouraged students to fill out the answers in an explanatory meaning. I said that if the answer was yes, say why. If the answer was no, say why.

**First question: What can you tell me about your Hebrew name?** David wrote his Hebrew name in Hebrew starting from the right to left as Hebrew is written. He wrote the following Hebrew letters in Hebrew: dalet, nun, yud, aleph, lamed spelling out the word Daniel. He wrote “my name means god is my judge.”

Darren wrote, “a person in the torah has it”. Melvin wrote, “It means warrior”. Anthony wrote, “The second word of my hebrew name is Moses.” Patrick wrote, “It means rock”. Brian wrote, “I can't tell much of my hebrew name but it's zave david ben yosef. Zave stands for wolf”.

**Second question: How do you describe God?** David wrote, “god is the creator”. Darren, “g-d is so mysterious no word can truly describe him.” Melvin wrote, “Hes a boss”. Anthony wrote, “As someone you can always talk to.” Patrick wrote, “watches over everyone” Brian wrote, “I describe haShem as a creator of all”.

**Third question: What do you think about God?** As I was looking at each journal I noticed that David had not written down an answer. I said, “Dave, you need help.” Then I turned to the class and said, “Let's ask questions to David that will help him think about God. What's a question that you might ask?” Melvin started giving hints to a video game that perplexed David. Melvin said, “The boss, are you kidding me?” I said, “Another way to describe that would be...” Melvin interrupted, “Awesome!” I continued, “Who's in charge?” Melvin said, “Yes, He is in charge.”

Brian asked to share what he wrote, “I think of haShem as a father of all and a

helper to the poor.” Melvin said, “Can I share mine? He's the boss.” I said, “We have to give hints to David to make it meaningful to him.” Melvin said, He made you in the way that you are. That's not a good thing? I was kidding. He made you.” Anthony, “Parents brought him to life.” I asked, “Parents brought who to life?” Melvin said, “David and my parents didn't bring me. I was adopted.” The students were very vocal on this subject.

Anthony added, “It's a cycle!” Melvin said, “He made a reason for it! There is a reason in his life and that is why God made him!” Anthony said, “And a reason for him to live.” In his journal, David wrote, “god is a ruler”. Darren wrote, “he is perfect”. Anthony wrote, “He is a good person or soul.” Patrick wrote, “The creator of every one.”

**Fourth question: Does God care about you?** David wrote, “God cares about me”. Darren, “Yes, I think so because if he didn't you wouldn't have been born. Melvin wrote, “Yeaaaaahhhhhhhhhh...Yes cuz if he didnt he wouldnt make us.” Anthony wrote, “Yes he cares about everyone because they all resemble him in some way.” Patrick wrote, “Yes because he made you and gave u a home and food”. Brian wrote, “No G-d does not care he cares for others and he can't specifically care for me.”

**Fifth question: Do you think God listens to you?** David wrote, “God listens to me because I prayer to him.” Darren wrote, “probably because he frees the slaves in Egypt”. Melvin wrote, “Si. Because He knows we pray.” Anthony wrote, “No, because he can't listen to every single person”. Patrick wrote, “no because he should not listen to your personal convercations”. Brian did not respond to this question.

**Sixth question: Does God hear your prayers?** David wrote, “god hears my prayers because I pray to him.” Darren wrote, “yes because your worshipping him.” Melvin wrote, “Si. We have serveses and a lot of people pray but hes a boss.” Anthony

wrote, "Yes, maybe because your asking G-D for forgiveness or something". Patrick wrote, "yes because u pray to god." Brian wrote, "G-d may hear my prayers if a miricale is to happen".

**Seventh question: Do you feel connected to God through dreams?** David wrote, "No, because my dreams have nothing to do with him." Darren wrote, "No really I never had a specific dream about him but then again his creations are in my dream." Melvin wrote, "No. because I dont remember I dream." Anthony wrote, "No, because I don't dream about that." Patrick wrote, "yes because I think god gives u dreams." Brian wrote, "No, I don't feel g-d in my dreams it doesn't seem he's there"

**Eighth question: Do animals help you feel connected to God?** David wrote, "No, I dont know how to explain." Darren wrote, "No, I don't know why." Melvin wrote, "No. I cant explain why only my old dog can because Hes loveing and campationit." Anthony wrote, "Yes, because G-D created them." Patrick wrote, "no I can't explain why". Brian wrote, "I love animals".

**Does nature help you feel connected to God?** David wrote, "Yes, because there is nothing man-made there." Darren wrote, "Maybe not sure." Melvin wrote, "no. I D K why" Anthony wrote, "Sure, because nature was created by G-D." Patrick wrote, "Yes I don't no why". Brian wrote, "Yes nature helps me feel connected to g-d".

**Are you comfortable with silence? Say why.** David wrote, "Yes, because I can relaxe". Darren wrote, "Yes. Yes and no it depends how long" Melvin wrote, "no. It Disturbs me". Anthony wrote, "Yes, because its relaxing". Patrick wrote, "no because I will laugh". Brian did not respond to this question.

In order to get feedback from the class, I asked the following question: "I want to



take the chance now of asking what you thought of me coming into the class. Could I have done a better job? What are things you liked and what are things you didn't like?" Brian, "I actually thought the first time you came here you were going to observe us, if we were going to do any stupid stuff."

Then I asked "If you were going to teach Spiritual Direction or Spiritual Guidance; talking to God; having a connection to God; how would you do that?" Brian said, "Sleep, sleeping." Melvin said, "Sleeping isn't meditating, Brian. Sleeping isn't solving the world's problems." Anthony, "You block all of it out." Melvin, "But if you sleep and block everything out, you wouldn't wake up. One day you would wake up and you would be ninety years old."

I asked Brian, "Why would sleeping be a way to teach Spiritual Direction?" Brian, "You're relaxed." Melvin interrupted, "With every nightmare." Brian, "It's quiet." I said, "Melvin, wait." Brian, "It's relaxing, peaceful, quiet and I guess you can meditate while your eyes are closed and you're lying down." I then asked if he was referring more to meditation than sleeping saying, "Maybe more of a meditation than sleeping?" Brian, "I guess." To clarify I asked, "If you're sleeping, does that mean you're dreaming or not dreaming?" Brian, "You're dreaming." Further clarifying I asked, "If you're dreaming, does that mean you're connecting to God?" Brian, "Yeah, I guess." Melvin said, "That's wrong! It's not relaxing if you have a nightmare. Two..."

Regarding the social interaction of the class I said, "First of all, it's not fair to say someone else is wrong. You might have an opinion about what you think is right, but there isn't necessarily a right or wrong answer." At this point I transitioned the focus to the upcoming holiday of Shavuot saying, "Guys, we are in a process leading up to the

giving of the torah at Sinai. If you're trying to better yourself, during this period, each day, what are things you would do to better yourself during this period leading up to Sinai?"

Darren said that there is a tradition of not getting your hair cut. Melvin said that he was confused regarding bettering yourself. I said, "For you Melvin, how do have more discipline to study so that when you have a test, you have a sense of victory rather than defeat?" Melvin said, "You eliminate all the things around you that are distracting." I said, "OK, eliminating distraction." Melvin continued, "But I have ADHD." I asked, "Do you want to explain what that is?" Melvin, "You get distracted a lot, can't pay attention." Teacher Koro Terroade explained that it stands for, "Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder." I asked, "How do you feel about having that label?" Melvin, "I take a pill."

At this point, I turned the conversation in another direction. "What did you think about the tug of war last week? Did your hands get sore?" Melvin, "We should do that again." Four students said they wanted to participate again this week. Darren and Brian did not. I wanted the physical act of struggling in the tug of war to be a symbol or metaphor for the inner struggle that correlates to becoming a better person. I said to Melvin, "As you are doing the tug of war, focus on not being distracted and the work you have to do. When it's time to do your homework, think about what we are doing right now...the struggle, the struggle; the tug of war."

As Anthony, David, Melvin and Patrick prepared to participate in the tug of war with rope, Brian and Darren were the teams' answer men. Since they didn't want to physically participate in the tug of war with the rope, their job was to answer to questions that I would pose to the class. Answering the questions correctly would enable those

holding the rope to begin the struggle. So, before the tug of war, I posed these questions to the answer men. Struggling to become a state of Israel, what was that like? Right before the state of Israel was formed, what do you think the land was like? The answer men said, “Dry, arid plantation; Hard to grow things.” I said “Imagine trying to live when you have sandy desert and trying to grow things for food.” Brian compared this to a time in the United States when there were dust bowls. It destroyed homes and made life a struggle.

Due to these creatively correct answers, the rope could be engaged by the rest of the class in the tug of war. One, two, three would be the count to signal beginning the tug of war. I said, “We are going to count in Hebrew up to three. You have to know your Hebrew to know when we have the magic number of three: Echad. [One] Shtayim.[Two] Shalosh [Three].” There was some struggling but due to limited space, all the students moved downstairs to the Siben Auditorium in order to gain more space.

When the tug of war contests were finished, everyone went back upstairs. I asked, “How would you translate this physical experience, struggling, with something in your life connected to being a better person...something connected with your relationship with God? This physical struggling that you went through. How would you translate it to a message for today about how to be a better person in the world?”

Melvin said, “If you do that, your hands get rope burn and they hurt.” I said, “Guys, since I only have a few more minutes with you, I want to offer you a blessing.” The students asked for chocolate. I said to Melvin, “Melvin, as I am offering you this chocolate, what is a blessing you can offer the group?” Melvin, “Never give up hope and you need to be like the little train, 'I think I can, I think I can.'” Darren couldn't think of a

blessing. Melvin offered one on Darren's behalf, "Be strong." I asked Darren, "What does that mean?" Someone else said, "Work out." Darren said, "Not necessarily. You could be emotionally strong." Anthony said, "Be nice." Brian said, "Be smart and intelligent, always do the right thing."

I said, "Here's my blessing for you. It's the priestly blessing which we find in the Torah. May God bless you and keep you. May God shine God's countenance upon you and May God grant you peace!" The teachers said, "Amen." I said, "Do you know what the root word of amen is? Amen is from emunah, faith!" I said, "May it be so." Then Melvin proudly exclaimed, "That's my mom's name! My mom's name is Faith." I added, "Even in the midst of not thinking you were going to win your tug of war, you had faith. You had faith in yourself and it wasn't even about winning. It was faith in participating, in being counted and having the courage to lose. Winning is easy but dealing with losing, that's harder." I thanked everyone and said goodbye.

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